

SB2025



An Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

January 31, 2018

The Honorable Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair
Senate Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection and Health

The Honorable Josh Green, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services

Re: SB 2025 – Relating to Homelessness

Dear Chair Green, Chair Baker, and Members of the Committees:

The Hawaii Medical Service Association (HMSA) appreciates the opportunity to testify on SB 2025, which would mandate health plans to provide coverage for the treatment of homelessness. HMSA appreciates the intent of this legislation and continues to work with stakeholders to address the issue as it relates to HMSA and Hawaii's broader healthcare system.

The plight of families and individuals experiencing homelessness is visible to everyone in the community. We too are concerned about those who lack appropriate shelter, many of whom have health concerns, including behavioral health issues and/or who suffer from substance abuse.

HMSA and the HMSA Foundation continue to actively work with community stakeholders to address homelessness. We continue working with the State Department of Health's Hawaii Pathway Project to help provide housing and services to the chronically homeless with behavioral health problems. Likewise, we have been working closely with the DHS Med-QUEST division on their efforts to develop and implement a supportive housing system via the 1115 waiver process; we applaud these efforts and continue to support similar efforts as suggested in SB 2025.

The HMSA Foundation's most recent grants include Family Promise of Hawaii for housing and support services to the homeless, HOPE Services Hawaii for housing for the homeless on Hawaii Island, and separately to Aloha Harvest and the Hawaii Foodbank to provide food support to the low-income and homeless. We also continue to be engaged in the H4 project in Iwilei; a local effort that will expand access to health care and housing related services to those most in need in urban Honolulu.

We appreciate the intent of SB 2025 to assist individuals experiencing homelessness. However, we are concerned that establishing a new mandate for coverage of the treatment of homelessness may have consequences for our members and the overall healthcare system. While the Bill defines "treatment of homelessness" and allows plans to determine medical necessity, we are uncertain as to how to clearly apply medical necessity standards to the "treatment of homelessness."

Given this is a new mandate, the Committees may wish to consider a review by the State Auditor, as is provided for under Section 23-51, HRS in order to completely understand the impact this benefit could have on the existing health care system and also determine what, if any, treatment is already available to the target population. While SB 2025 attempts to address the problem of homelessness through the healthcare system, homelessness really encompasses an array of issues: access to housing, economic security, social stability, as well as healthcare access.

Thank you for allowing us to testify on SB 2025.

Sincerely,

Pono Chong
Vice President, Government Relations