

Date of Hearing: April 21, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HEALTH
Mia Bonta, Chair
AB 1682 (Hart) – As Introduced February 2, 2026

SUBJECT: Health care coverage: scalp cooling.

SUMMARY: Requires a health plan, health insurer, and the Medi-Cal program, to provide coverage for scalp cooling, as prescribed by a health care provider in connection with chemotherapy for persons with cancer. Requires cost-sharing for scalp cooling to be no less favorable to an enrollee than cost-sharing for oncology supportive care services. Defines “scalp cooling” as the use of a medical device or system cleared by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) applied to the scalp before, during, or after the administration of chemotherapy to reduce the incidence or severity of chemotherapy-induced alopecia (hair loss).

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the Department Managed Health Care (DMHC) to regulate health plans under the Knox-Keene Health Care Service Plan Act of 1975 and California Department of Insurance (CDI) to regulate health insurers. [Health and Safety Code (HSC) § 1340, *et seq.* and Insurance Code (INS) § 106, *et seq.*]
- 2) Establishes the Medi-Cal Program, administered by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), to provide comprehensive health benefits to low-income individuals who meet specified eligibility criteria. [Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) § 14000, *et seq.*]
- 3) Establishes California's Essential Health Benefit (EHB) benchmark under the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA) as the Kaiser Small Group Health Maintenance Organization contract. Establishes existing California health insurance mandates and the 10 ACA mandated benefits. [HSC § 1367.005 and INS § 10112.27]
- 4) Specifies EHBs in the following 10 categories: ambulatory patient services; emergency services; hospitalization; maternity and newborn care; mental health and substance use disorder services; prescription drugs; rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices; laboratory services; preventive and wellness services and chronic disease management; and, pediatric services, including oral and vision care. [HSC § 1367.005 and INS § 10112.27]
- 5) Defines “basic health care services” as all of the following:
 - a) Physician services, including consultation and referral;
 - b) Hospital inpatient services and ambulatory care services;
 - c) Diagnostic laboratory and therapeutic radiologic services;
 - d) Home health services;
 - e) Preventive health services;

- f) Emergency health care services, including ambulance and ambulance transport services and out-of-area coverage. Basic health care services includes ambulance and ambulance transport services provided through the 911 emergency response system; and,
 - g) Hospice care. [HSC § 1345]
- 6) Establishes the California Health Care Quality and Affordability Act, which creates the Office of Health Care Affordability (OHCA) within the Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI). Identifies OHCA's three primary responsibilities: managing spending targets, monitoring system performance, and assessing market consolidation. Requires OHCA to collect, analyze, and publicly report data on total health care expenditures, and enforce spending targets set by a Health Care Affordability Board (Board). [HSC § 127500, *et seq.*]

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill has not been analyzed by a fiscal committee.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **PURPOSE OF THIS BILL.** According to the author, this bill is a critical step toward improving supportive cancer care and ensuring that patients receiving chemotherapy can have access to medically necessary treatment. The author continues that scalp cooling is an FDA cleared, evidence-based therapy for chemotherapy-induced hair loss – yet insurance coverage remains inconsistent and unpredictable. The author notes that this leaves many patients with significant out-of-pocket costs during an already difficult time. The author concludes that by requiring California health plans and health insurers to cover scalp cooling when prescribed by a provider, this bill will remove major financial barriers and support patients' mental health by reducing treatment-related distress.
 - 2) **BACKGROUND.** Each year, approximately 185,000 Californians receive a new cancer diagnosis. Chemotherapy — medication delivered intravenously to target rapidly dividing tumor cells — is used to treat many common solid tumor cancers, including breast, ovarian, uterine, lung, and sarcomas. Chemotherapy-induced alopecia is typically temporary; hair usually begins to regrow within weeks to months after treatment ends. Chemotherapy-induced alopecia typically begins 2 to 4 weeks after the start of treatment and is consistently among the most commonly reported and distressing side effects of cancer treatment. Unlike most other side effects, hair loss is visible to others, and patients may lose control over who knows they have cancer and when. Scalp cooling works by cooling the scalp before, during, and after chemotherapy infusion to reduce the amount of drug delivered to hair follicles, thereby aiming to reduce hair loss. FDA-cleared scalp cooling systems are automated, which allows cool fluid to circulate through the cap to maintain the desired temperature for long periods of time. Manual cold caps, by contrast, are stored in freezers or with dry ice and must be swapped out by hand throughout the infusion as they warm up. The FDA-cleared scalp cooling systems covered under this bill are marketed under the names DigniCap, Paxman, and Amma. This bill would require coverage for FDA-cleared automated scalp cooling systems; manual cold caps are excluded from the bill.
- a) **California Health Benefits Review Program (CHBRP).** CHBRP was created in response to AB 1996 (Thomson), Chapter 795, Statutes of 2002, which requests the University of California to assess legislation proposing a mandated benefit or service and prepare a written analysis with relevant data on the medical, economic, and public health

impacts of proposed health plan and health insurance benefit mandate legislation. SB 125 (Hernandez), Chapter 9, Statutes of 2015, added an impact assessment on EHBs, and legislation that impacts health insurance benefit designs, cost-sharing, premiums, and other health insurance topics to CHBRP's purview. CHBRP reviewed this bill and included the following impact estimates in their analysis:

- i) **Premium increases.** An estimated 680 additional enrollees would receive scalp cooling under the provisions of this bill, resulting in overall premiums paid by employers and enrollees increasing by an estimated \$4,010,000 annually.
 - ii) **Medical effectiveness.** CHBRP found strong evidence that FDA-cleared automated scalp cooling devices are effective in reducing chemotherapy-induced alopecia. Some evidence suggests that scalp cooling devices may be less effective for patients with different hair types, such as Black patients with curly hair. There is strong evidence indicating that scalp cooling does not raise the risk of scalp metastasis.
 - iii) **Public health impacts.** CHBRP determined that approximately 333 newly covered enrollees experiencing significantly less hair loss than they otherwise would have, which may reduce distress, anxiety, and self-image impacts associated with chemotherapy-induced alopecia. The long-term trajectory of this bill may depend on several interacting factors, including the pace of utilization growth relative to per-unit pricing, and the reduction in utilization of other services like medical wigs, cold caps, or mental health services that were not directly modeled in this analysis.
- b) **OHCA cost targets.** OHCA was established in 2022 in response to widespread cost-related access challenges across California. According to the California Health Care Foundation (CHCF), over half of Californians say they skip or delay health care due to costs. OHCA collects, analyzes, and publicly reports data on total health care expenditures and enforces spending targets. OHCA's spending targets are intended to reduce excess spending and slow health care spending growth. In April of 2024, OHCA approved a statewide cost growth target of 3.5% starting in 2025 and phasing down to 3% by 2029. Health care entities, including health plans and insurers, are subject to the statewide spending target and are subject to progressive enforcement if the entity's costs exceed the target. Some entities have raised concerns that new legislative insurance mandates will make it difficult for them to meet the established cost growth target.

Current law does not explicitly require OHCA to adjust the cost growth targets based on changes to state policy, such as insurance mandates, that may increase spending. However, it does require OHCA to consider state benefit mandates in its development and enforcement of cost growth targets. Specifically, when establishing cost growth target methodology, OHCA is required to review relevant state policy changes impacting covered benefits, provider reimbursement, and costs, among other factors. In addition, in enforcing cost growth targets, OHCA is required to consider factors that contribute to spending in excess of the applicable target, and the extent to which each entity has control over the applicable components of its cost targets.

- 3) **SUPPORT.** Cooler Heads Care writes in support of this bill, stating that hair loss is not simply cosmetic; for many patients, it represents loss of privacy, identity, and control during an already vulnerable time. Cooler Heads Care continues that in modern oncology care, there are supportive remedies available for nearly every major chemotherapy side effect, from

medications that address nausea and vomiting to therapies that manage pain and fatigue, hair loss should be no different. Cooler Heads Care continues that demand for scalp cooling continues to increase as awareness expands and clinicians seek supportive care solutions that treat the whole person. Cooler Heads Care notes that despite its demonstrated benefit, cost for scalp cooling remains a barrier for many patients. Cooler Heads Care concludes that insurance coverage would significantly expand equitable access, ensuring that patients are not forced to forego this supportive therapy due to financial constraints.

- 4) OPPOSITION.** The California Association of Health Plans, Association of Life and Health Insurance Companies, and America’s Health Insurance Plans oppose this bill and 10 others that mandate new benefit coverage. The opposition states that these bills will increase costs, reduce choice and competition, and further incent some employers and individuals to avoid state regulation by seeking alternative coverage options. The opposition continues that state mandates increase premium costs for families and individuals and small business owners who cannot or do not wish to self-insure. The opposition argues that large employers, unions, small businesses, and hard-working families value their ability to shop for the right health plan – at the right price – that best fits their needs. The opposition continues that benefit mandates impose a one-size-fits-all approach to medical care and benefit design without consideration for consumer choice. The opposition states that while OHCA is working to curb healthcare costs and ensure resources are allocated in an efficient and affordable manner, adding new mandates at this pivotal moment could disrupt these efforts by driving up costs for insurers, employers, and consumers, while making it difficult for health care entities to meet the established spending target. The opposition argues that by halting new mandates, the Legislature can support OHCA’s efforts of making quality health care accessible and affordable for Californians. The opposition concludes that now is the time to focus on stability and affordability for all Californians.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Biocom
CenCal Health
Cooler Heads Care, Inc.
Health Access California
Paxman US Inc.
Four individuals

Opposition

America's Health Insurance Plans
Association of California Life & Health Insurance Companies
California Association of Health Plans
California Small Business Association

Analysis Prepared by: Riana King / HEALTH / (916) 319-2097