SENATE THIRD READING
SB 626 (Smallwood-Cuevas and Cervantes)
As Amended July 17, 2025
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Limits the definition of ″maternal mental health (MMH) condition″ to a mental health condition that occurs during the pregnancy or postpartum period. Requires a licensed health care practitioner who provides prenatal, postpartum, or perinatal care for a patient or clint who screens positive for a MMH condition to ensure that the patient or client receives appropriate clinical evaluations and if diagnosed, reis offered or provided treatment consistent with the provider′s scope of practice. Requires health plans and insurers to provide case management or care coordination for an enrollee or insured who screens positive for a MMH condition in accordance with the plan or insurer′s existing case management and care coordination programs. Encourages health plans and insurers to improve treatment, including thorough the use of outpatient prescription drugs approved for MMH by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

COMMENTS

Prevalence of Perinatal Mental Health (PMH) illnesses. According to the National Institute of Health, perinatal mental illness is a significant complication of pregnancy and the postpartum period. These disorders include depression, anxiety disorders, and postpartum psychosis, which usually manifests as bipolar disorder. Postpartum blues are a common but lesser manifestation of postpartum affective disturbance. Perinatal psychiatric disorders impair a person′s function and are associated with suboptimal development of offspring. Risk factors include past history of depression, anxiety, or bipolar disorder, as well psychosocial factors, such as ongoing conflict with the partner, poor social support, and ongoing stressful life events. Early symptoms of depression, anxiety, and mania can be detected through screening in pregnancy and the postpartum period. Early detection and effective management of perinatal psychiatric disorders are critical for the welfare of parents′ and their offspring.

A 2025 study published in Frontiers in Global Women′s Health, *″Addressing inequalities in the identification and management of perinatal mental health difficulties: The perspectives of minoritised women, healthcare practitioners and the voluntary sector*,″ notes that PMH difficulties affect approximately one in five birthing women. If not identified and managed appropriately, these PMH difficulties can carry impacts across generations, affecting mental health and relationship outcomes. There are known inequalities in identification and management across the healthcare pathway. Rates are likely higher in low- and middle-income countries and, within high-income countries, vulnerability is greatest amongst minoritised groups, including women from ethnic minority backgrounds. Rates of PMH difficulties in trans- and non-binary birthing people are unknown, although initial evidence suggested there may be increased vulnerability.

Lack of clarity and consistency in referral pathways (such as different pathways, practices, tools, and services on offer across different geographical areas) was also described as a barrier. Health care providers surveyed for the study noted that while they are well placed to build relationships and create safe environments that enable women to disclose their mental health difficulties, lack

of clarity about referral pathways and available services acts as a block to those women accessing treatment or specialist support.

Consequences of untreated PMH conditions. According to a 2025 Fact Sheet from the Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance, individuals with untreated PMH conditions during pregnancy are more likely to have poor prenatal care; use substances such as alcohol, tobacco, or drugs, and experience physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Infants born to those with untreated PMH conditions are at higher risk for preterm birth, small for gestational size, and low birth weight. Untreated PMH conditions in the parent can also increase the risk for impaired parent-child interactions, behavioral, cognitive, and emotional delays in the child, as well as adverse childhood experiences. Parents who are depressed or anxious are more likely to make more trips to the emergency department or doctor′s office, find it challenging to manage their child′s chronic health conditions, and not adhere to guidance for safe infant sleep and car seat usage.

According to the Author
PMH conditions, including depression and anxiety, are the most common complications of pregnancy and a leading cause of maternal mortality. In California, one in three birthing people are affected, yet 85% go untreated. These conditions cost the state $2.4 billion annually and increase the risk of chronic mental health issues, suicide, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, preterm birth, impaired parent-child bonding, adverse childhood experiences, and developmental delays in children. Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities are disproportionately impacted. The author states that this bill addresses this urgent need by ensuring equitable, comprehensive mental health care for all birthing people. The author concludes that this bill will increase access to timely mental health care, reduce societal costs, and improve long-term outcomes, particularly in marginalized communities.

Arguments in Support
Black Women for Wellness, Maternal Mental Health NOW, Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health, and Postpartum Support International, California Chapter are the sponsors of this bill and state that this bill will make significant strides in improving access to mental health care for birthing families, particularly those from marginalized communities. The sponsors conclude that by expanding coverage and ensuring accountability, this bill will help reduce health disparities, save lives, and ultimately lead to healthier, more supported families across the state.

Arguments in Opposition
The California Association of Health Plans and the Association of California Life and Health Insurance Companies note, in opposition to 16 health insurance mandate bills, including this bill, 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. Benefit mandates impose a one-size-fits-all approach to medical care and benefit design without consideration for consumer choice.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, California Department of Insurance estimates costs of $6,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2025-26, $32,000 in FY 2026-27, and $15,000 in FY 2027-28 and ongoing for state administration (Insurance Fund). The Department of Managed Health Care anticipates minor and absorbable costs. CalPERS does not anticipate costs associated with this bill. Costs to the Department of Health Care Services, if any, are likely negligible.

VOTES

SENATE FLOOR: 38-0-2
YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener
ABS, ABST OR NV: Hurtado, Reyes

ASM HEALTH: 16-0-0
YES: Bonta, Chen, Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Caloza, Carrillo, Flora, Mark González, Krell, Patel, Patterson, Celeste Rodriguez, Sanchez, Schiavo, Sharp-Collins, Stefani

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0
YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Jeff Gonzalez, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 74-0-5
YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas
ABS, ABST OR NV: Alvarez, Berman, Elhawary, Gallagher, Valencia

UPDATED

VERSION: July 17, 2025

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