



Commonwealth of Virginia

Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services

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Virginia Medicaid Agency Reports Increased Access to Addiction Treatment

*~Growth in treatment rates contributes to reduced emergency
department visits ~*

Richmond – The Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) today released a new report highlighting significant increases in access to addiction treatment for Medicaid members along with improved health outcomes, including a steady reduction in emergency department visits.

[The two-year report on the nationally recognized Addiction and Recovery Treatment Services \(ARTS\) benefit](#), launched in April 2017, is the first evaluation to include adults who gained health coverage when Virginia expanded its Medicaid program.

“The ARTS benefit continues to generate amazing outcomes for our members,” said Karen Kimsey, DMAS Director. “Because of Medicaid expansion, thousands of newly eligible adults have access to quality services. The solid growth in treatment rates we are seeing is testimony to the fact that these individuals are proactively seeking the services they need for recovery.”

More than 69,000 Medicaid members had a diagnosed substance use disorder in the second year of the ARTS benefit, including 12,000 adults who enrolled in the three months after new eligibility rules took effect January 1, 2019. The total number of members with a substance use disorder includes 30,000 with an opioid use disorder and 24,000 with an alcohol use disorder.

Treatment rates continue to rise even as more individuals are seeking services, according to independent research by Virginia Commonwealth University's Department of Health Behavior and Policy. Among Medicaid members in the program prior to expansion, the treatment rate more than doubled, to 49 percent, in the two-year history of ARTS.

The evaluation documents a continued decline in emergency department visits and acute inpatient hospital admissions related to substance use disorder among Medicaid members. Emergency department visits for opioid use disorders declined 32 percent since the ARTS benefit began, and total visits for all substance use disorders decreased 7 percent.

The research journal *Health Affairs* this month published a joint article by DMAS and VCU reporting a 9 percentage point decline in the likelihood that Virginia Medicaid members with an opioid use disorder would visit an emergency department following the launch of ARTS. In comparison, there was less than a 1 percentage point decline in the likelihood of emergency room visits by Virginia Medicaid members without a substance use disorder.

“With two years of data now available, we are digging deeper into the results of the ARTS benefit and identifying strategies to support members as they transition across the continuum of evidence-based treatment options,” said Ellen Montz, Chief Deputy Director and Chief Health Economist for DMAS. “VCU’s independent evaluations are crucial to our goal of achieving the best outcomes for our members.”

One factor driving increased access to treatment is growth in the number of providers serving Medicaid members, including more than 4,000 outpatient practitioners. The ARTS benefit initiated a new model of care known as Preferred Office-Based Opioid Treatment programs, which increased from 38 to 131 current locations.

Under this model of care, the percentage of individuals receiving buprenorphine treatment who were also participating in counseling or psychotherapy increased from 61 percent to 73 percent between the first and second years of the benefit. Buprenorphine is the most widely used medication to treat opioid use disorder.

State lawmakers are currently considering a budget proposal by Governor Ralph Northam that would expand this model of care to all substance use disorders.

The Virginia Medicaid agency recently received a \$5 million federal planning grant to further increase access to evidence-based treatment for opioid addiction and other substance use disorders. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services administers the grant under the Substance Use Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment for Patients and Communities (SUPPORT) Act.

“Addiction is a major public health concern affecting our members, our economy and the social well-being of our communities and families,” said Tammy Whitlock, DMAS Deputy Director of Complex Care and Services. “This grant will enable us to provide targeted care for priority populations, including pregnant women and individuals released from incarceration.”