

Louisiana Medicaid Non-opioid Pain Treatment and Opioid Alternatives

Response to SR 82 of the 2021 Regular Legislative Session

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Introduction and Overview

Pain is a common and debilitating condition that leads to significant healthcare expenditures. It is the most common presenting complaint of many medical illnesses (e.g., early cancer, stomach ulcers), and can also be a condition in its own right (e.g., complex regional pain syndrome).

Between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, Louisiana Medicaid covered services to address pain for approximately 700,000 members (approximately 36% of all members) with claims totaling \$1.1 billion. The number of members and expenditures on pain by type and location are presented below.

Table 1: Number of Medicaid members and expenditures on treatment for pain from 7/1/20 through 6/30/21, by type and location

Pain type/location	Number of members	Approx. expenditures
Abdominal	237,325	\$282M
Limb	300,313	\$178M
Widespread/systemic	104,755	\$168M
Neuropathy	111,019	\$163M
Arthritis	110,055	\$151M
Back	187,486	\$147M
Chest	140,903	\$102M
Craniofacial	135,865	\$82M
Neck	77,664	\$53M
Pelvic	81,323	\$51M
*Pain can reflect the symptom of an underlying medical illness or a condition in its own right. Claims with diagnoses of more than one type or location are counted in each category.		

Opioid analgesics are prescribed to address pain in four situations: 1) acute pain (e.g., surgery or broken bone), 2) pain associated with cancer, 3) hospice care at the end of life, and 4) chronic non-cancer pain. Over the past several decades, with dramatic increases in opioid analgesic prescribing for chronic non-cancer pain, Louisiana and the United States experienced an unprecedented crisis of drug overdose deaths involving opioids. While the volume of opioid analgesics prescribed has decreased significantly in recent years, there is an urgent need for non-opioid treatments for pain.

In response to this issue, Senate Resolution (SR) 82 of the 2021 Regular Legislative Session, resolved that the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) shall report on options regarding reimbursements for non-opioid pain treatment and opioid alternatives in the Louisiana Medicaid program. LDH identified evidence-based treatments through review of the Pain Management Best Practices Inter-Agency Task Force Report produced by the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)¹.

¹ <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pmtf-final-report-2019-05-23.pdf>

This report is divided into three sections:

- Non-opioid pharmacologic treatments
- Medical and restorative services and devices
- Interventional procedures

While the report details coverage of non-opioid treatments for pain, Medicaid coverage is always dependent on patient and condition-specific information. Therefore, the information on coverage presented in the report may not necessarily reflect coverage for a specific Medicaid member with a given condition. In addition, coverage is only provided when the services or devices are determined to be medically necessary. Coverage may be subject to other limitations such as age limitations, amount and duration limitations, or site of service limitations. Members and providers should consult with Louisiana Medicaid or their contracted managed care organizations for further information.

Non-opioid Pharmacologic Treatments

Medicaid covers a very wide range of non-opioid medications for the treatment of chronic pain. Under federal law (Section 1927 of the Social Security Act), state Medicaid programs must cover all U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved medications where the manufacturer has signed a rebate agreement with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). In addition, while not coverable by Medicaid, RS 40:1046 and RS 40:1047 established the Medical Marijuana Program in Louisiana.

The below table provides a list of medication classes that can be used for the treatment of chronic pain.

Table 2: Non-opioid medications used to treat chronic pain

Medication Class	Description	Select Examples	Covered in Louisiana Medicaid?
Acetaminophen	Acetaminophen is a pain reliever and anti-fever medication widely used for the treatment of mild to moderate pain.	Acetaminophen	Yes, for acetaminophen combination products.*
Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID)	NSAIDs (topical and oral) can provide significant pain relief for inflammation, such as from arthritis, bone fractures or tumors, muscle pains, headache, and acute pain caused by injury or surgery.	Ibuprofen, diclofenac, naproxen, meloxicam	Yes*
Anticonvulsants	Anticonvulsants were originally developed to treat seizures, but they are also commonly used to treat different pain syndromes, including post-herpetic neuralgia, peripheral neuropathy, and migraine.	Gabapentin, pregabalin	
Antidepressants	Antidepressants are commonly used in various chronic pain conditions and are effective in a variety of chronic pain conditions, including neuropathic pain.	Amitriptyline, duloxetine	

Musculoskeletal agents	Musculoskeletal agents are commonly used for pain treatment, typically related to muscle spasms, although long-term efficacy is not established.	Baclofen, tizanidine, cyclobenzaprine	
Cannabinoids	Derivatives of the cannabis plant used for pain (e.g., medical marijuana authorized under RS 40:1046 and RS 40:1047).	Medical marijuana	Not coverable, classified as Schedule I by FDA.
*Under Section 1927 of the Social Security Act, state Medicaid programs must cover all FDA-approved prescription medications where the manufacturer has signed a rebate agreement with CMS. In addition, all Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs) cover over-the-counter medications as a value-added benefit.			

Medical and Restorative Services and Devices

Medical and restorative services include treatments provided by physicians, advanced practice registered nurses (APRN), and physician assistants (PA), as well as physical therapists (PT) and occupational therapists (OT). These services are essential for the comprehensive assessment of chronic pain, diagnosis of pain conditions, and as a key component of multimodal treatment for chronic pain. A list of medical and restorative services and devices is provided in below.

Table 3: Medical and restorative services and devices

Treatment	Description	Covered in Medicaid?*
Evaluation and management services	Diagnosis and treatment of an illness or injury by a physician, APRN, or PA.	Yes
Physical therapy	Evaluation and treatment of any physical or medical condition to restore normal function of the neuromuscular and skeletal system, to relieve pain, or to prevent disability by use of physical or mechanical means (RS 37:2407).	Yes
Occupational therapy	Evaluation, interpretation, treatment planning, and treatment of problems interfering with functional performance in persons impaired by physical illness or injury, emotional disorders, congenital or developmental disabilities, or the aging process, in order to achieve optimum functioning and prevention and health maintenance (RS 37:3003).	Yes
Chiropractic care	Diagnosis and treatment of neuromusculoskeletal conditions associated with the functional integrity of the spine (RS 37:2801).	For members under 21 years of age: Yes For members age 21 and older: Yes, as an “in lieu of” benefit for managed care enrollees

Acupuncture	Treatment by means of mechanical, thermal, or electrical stimulation effected by the insertion of needles at a point or combination of points on the surface of the body predetermined on the basis of the theory of the physiological interrelationship of body organs with an associated point or combination of points (RS 37:1356).	Covered by one MCO, Aetna Better Health
Orthotics	Braces and splints can immobilize and protect joints, reduce pain, decrease swelling, and facilitate healing of acute injuries.	Yes, depending on specific orthotic needed
Transcutaneous electric nerve stimulation (TENS)	A device that uses low-voltage electrical current for pain relief.	For members under 21 years of age: Yes, on a case-by-case basis For members age 21 and older: No
*Coverage is only provided when the services or devices are medically necessary. Coverage may be subject to other limitations such as age limitations, amount and duration limitations, or site of service limitations. Coverage is only listed as “yes” when the service is covered for a clinically meaningful population. Providers should consult with Louisiana Medicaid or their contracted MCOs for further information.		

Interventional and Surgical Procedures

When pain is due to an underlying medical illness, Medicaid covers a wide variety of interventional and surgical procedures to address it (e.g., fixation of a broken bone). The procedures listed below are typically used for pain that is unresponsive to other medical treatments. A list of intervention and surgical procedures is provided in the chart below.

Table 4: Intervention and Surgical Procedures

Treatment	Description*	Covered in Medicaid?***
Joint injections	Injections into joints (e.g., shoulder, elbow, wrist, knee, ankle) of local anesthetics, corticosteroids, or other agents.	Yes
Trigger point injections	Trigger point injections can be used to treat pain associated with headaches, myofascial pain syndrome, and low-back pain.	Yes
Peripheral nerve injections	Injections around peripheral nerves which are used for diagnostic and therapeutic pain relief purposes.	Yes
Facet joint nerve block and denervation injection	Injections for facet-related spinal pain of the low back and neck area.	Yes
Sympathetic nerve blocks	Nerve blocks used to treat neuropathic pain including complex regional pain syndrome.	Yes

Celiac plexus blocks	Injection that treats pain originating from celiac plexus nerves.	Yes
Epidural steroid injections	Injections that deliver anti-inflammatory medication directly into the epidural space (i.e., the region outside the sac of fluid surrounding the spinal cord) to treat back pain and radicular pain.	Yes
Epidural adhesiolysis	Procedure involving the mechanical dissolution of epidural scar tissue, which may alleviate pain.	Yes
Radiofrequency ablation	Procedure to ablate certain nerves that have been identified as contributing to chronic pain.	Yes
Cryoneuroablation	Use of a cryoprobe to freeze sensory nerves at the source of pain and provide pain relief.	Yes
Neuromodulation and spinal cord stimulation	Use of device-based electrical or magnetic stimulation to activate central or peripheral nervous system tissue associated with pain pathways.	Yes
Implantable infusion pumps	Implantable medication infusion pumps with catheters in the spinal fluid can supply medication continuously to the central nervous system.	Yes, to deliver medication to treat spasms
Vertebral augmentation	Application of cement to vertebral compression fractures that are painful and refractory to medical treatment; can include vertebroplasty (injecting cement into a fractured vertebra) or balloon kyphoplasty (using an inflatable balloon to create injection space).	Yes
Interspinous process spacer devices	Device implanted between spinous processes to open narrowed nerve channels to treat pain due to narrowing of the spine.	Yes
Percutaneous discectomy	Procedure to remove disc material to relieve pressure on nerves causing pain.	Yes
<p>*Descriptions² adapted from HHS report</p> <p>**Coverage is only provided when the services or devices are medically necessary. Coverage may be subject to other limitations such as age limitations, amount and duration limitations, or site of service limitations. Coverage is only listed as “yes” when the service is covered for a clinically meaningful population. Providers should consult with Louisiana Medicaid or their contracted MCOs for further information.</p>		

² <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pmtf-final-report-2019-05-23.pdf>

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