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## **A letter from the President of American Association of Clinical Urologists to all those affected by the recent California wildfires and North Carolina's hurricane disasters**

As a fellow Californian who lost a home to a California wildfire in the past and responded to Hurricane Katrina as a reservist, I feel the pain of those who have lost loved ones or property. But I also share the pride and sacrifice of the first responders who help our fellow Americans in need. Thus, the spirit of this letter is to give our deep empathy to those affected and to share resources for those who remain in limbo.

The first places to turn are your state's medical societies and/or State Departments of Healthcare or Health insurance regulators. California's two health insurance regulators have issued guidance to payors, reminding them of their obligations under state law to ensure continued access to medically necessary health care services during the **State of Emergency** due to the Southern California wildfires.

Both the **California Department of Insurance** and the **California Department of Managed Health Care** sent notices directing health insurance companies to remove unnecessary barriers to care, and to submit emergency plans to their regulators detailing the actions they have taken or are in the process of taking to ensure that the health care needs of its enrollees are met, including:

- Relaxing time limits for or suspending requirements for prior authorization, precertification or referrals
- Extending claims filing deadlines
- Suspending prescription refill limitations; allowing the impacted insured to refill prescriptions at out-of-network pharmacies and covering the prescriptions as if they were obtained from a network pharmacy; allowing earlier refills; providing expedited shipping options for mail-order prescriptions at no additional cost to the insured; and waiving any increased cost sharing obligations for using retail pharmacies instead of mail-order pharmacies
- Authorizing an enrollee to replace medical equipment or supplies
- Allowing an enrollee to access an appropriate out-of-network provider if an in-network provider is unavailable due to the state of emergency or if the insured is out of the area due to displacement
- Having a toll-free assistance number that affected enrollees can call



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Under state law, health plans and insurers operating in counties affected by an official state of emergency are required to act quickly to ensure patients in areas affected by wildfires and other disasters have continued access to care and must file their emergency plans with the appropriate regulator within 48 hours of the emergency declaration.

### Medicare/Medicaid Medi-Cal Rx

Medi-Cal Rx is also permitting emergency overrides on pharmacy claims for members residing in Los Angeles and Ventura Counties. These overrides will be accepted for claims with dates of service of January 7 through February 7, 2025. However, the California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) has indicated it will extend this flexibility if needed. The [DHCS guidance for pharmacy providers](#) does not indicate how/if Medi-Cal Rx will allow impacted insureds to refill prescriptions at out-of-network pharmacies. The California Medical Association (CMA) has inquired about this issue and will report back when we have more information.

### Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services

The CMA is also urging the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to take action to assist physicians and patients affected by the devastating wildfires, including:

- Extending claims filing deadlines
- Eliminating prior authorization and other reporting requirements
- Invoking extreme and uncontrollable circumstances exemptions for the MIPS quality reporting program to exempt physicians from reporting and penalties
- Providing accelerated or advance Medicare payments

### CMA Assistance for Physicians

CMA is working with regulators and payors to understand the flexibilities offered by each payor and will soon publish a guide to help ensure patients continue to have appropriate access to medically necessary health care services.

Physicians who are having trouble getting care for patients affected by the wildfires can contact the CMA Center for Economic Services for assistance at (800) 786 4262 or [economicservices@cmadocs.org](mailto:economicservices@cmadocs.org).



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#### For More Information

- CDI Guidance: [State of Emergency Notification Filing Requirements](#)
- DMHC Guidance: [APL 25-001 - Southern California Fires and Enrollees' Continued Access to Health Care Services](#)
- DHCS Guidance for Pharmacy Providers: [State of Emergency Override Activation](#)
- CDI: [Assembly Bill 2941 — Health Care Coverage: State of Emergency](#)

The AACU will continue to monitor the needs of our physicians, and their patients and will assist all to the best of our abilities and resources as above.

May God bless,

**Peter N Bretan, Jr, MD, FACS**  
**President, AACU 2024-5**  
**Past President SFMMS, CUA, and CMA**



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