

VITILIGO

Vitiligo is an autoimmune disorder that destroys special cells in the skin, causing lost skin pigment.

Although visible, vitiligo is not cosmetic. Twenty percent of vitiligo patients have other health issues, such as thyroid disorders, Type 1 diabetes and arthritis, among others.

Vitiligo can also lead to negative mental health effects, including anxiety, depression and social isolation.

INCONSISTENT CLASSIFICATION

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) "Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit Manual" classifies vitiligo treatment as medical, stating, "Part D drugs indicated for the treatment of... vitiligo are not considered cosmetic." However, some government insurance types still classify vitiligo as cosmetic.

Many patients under Medicaid and TRICARE, for example, continue to fall victim to misclassification and cannot access their medications.

Medicaid

Eleven state Medicaid plans deviate from CMS' stance and do not cover vitiligo treatments because they classify them as cosmetic. Seven states – Arizona, Hawaii, Iowa, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island and Virginia – have plans that expressly exclude vitiligo treatments. Four other states – Alabama, North Dakota, South Dakota and West Virginia – deny treatment in practice, with providers reporting insurance denials for vitiligo treatment.

TRICARE

TRICARE, the federal health program for active service members, retirees and their families, also fails to classify vitiligo as a medical condition. The Department of Veterans Affairs, however, along with health plans for other federal employees, correctly classifies vitiligo and provides access to treatment.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PATIENTS?

As new treatments become available, coverage inconsistencies are troubling. The Food and Drug Administration recently approved the first and only prescription drug for vitiligo. The treatment is designed to restore skin pigment, reducing the risk of skin cancer and alleviating the psychological burden of vitiligo.

All patients on government health plans deserve access to treatments such as this. But until policymakers and regulators enforce a standard definition of vitiligo, Medicaid patients and service members will continue to face treatment barriers.