

SUBJECT: Providing mental health screenings with the Texas Health Steps program

COMMITTEE: Public Health — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 8 ayes — Price, Sheffield, Burkett, Collier, Cortez, Guerra, Oliverson,
Zedler

0 nays

3 absent — Arévalo, Coleman, Klick

WITNESSES: For — Michele Guzman, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute; Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Pritesh Gandhi, Texas Pediatric Society, Texas Medical Association, and Texas Academy of Family Physicians; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Matt Moore, Children's Health System of Texas; Christine Bryan, Clarity Child Guidance Center; Eric Woomer, Federation of Texas Psychiatry; Grace Chimene, League of Women Voters of Texas; Will Francis, National Association of Social Workers-Texas Chapter; Dan Hinkle, Texas Academy of Family Physicians; Donald Lee, Texas Conference of Urban Counties; Carrie Kroll, Texas Hospital Association; Michelle Romero, Texas Medical Association; Aidan Utzman, United Ways of Texas; Leslie Lestz; Thomas Parkinson)

Against — Lee Spiller, Citizens Commission on Human Rights; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Judy Powell and Johana Scot, Parent Guidance Center; and 13 individuals)

On — Joshua Newman, Texas Home School Coalition; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Tamela Griffin, Health and Human Services Commission)

BACKGROUND: The Texas Health Steps program is Medicaid's wellness program for children from birth to age 20. The program allows free medical exams starting at birth and free dental exams starting at 6 months old. Each exam includes all medical screenings, vaccinations, and laboratory tests recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics for the child's age.

DIGEST: HB 1600 would require the Health and Human Services executive commissioner to set rules to:

- require that the Texas Health Steps program provide at least one mental health screening to each recipient who was between 12 and 18 years old, using one or more validated, standardized mental health screening tools;
- require that the mental health screening be conducted during a recipient's annual medical exam;
- allow a provider to conduct these screenings; and
- only allow a provider to be reimbursed for one such screening per recipient during the recipient's annual medical exam.

If, before implementing any provision of the bill, a state agency determined that a waiver or authorization from a federal agency was necessary, the affected agency would be required to request the waiver or authorization and could delay implementing that provision until the waiver or authorization was granted.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2017.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1600 would reflect a recommendation made by the House Select Committee on Mental Health. The bill would allow the Texas Health Steps program to provide mental health screenings and would improve access to such screenings for adolescents enrolled in Medicaid.

Many mental illnesses begin around age 12, making early detection and intervention critical. Targeting symptoms early leads to better outcomes, lessens the chance of disability, and can prevent years of suffering. Many significant life events, including trauma, can occur between the ages of 12 and 18. HB 1600 would permit health providers to conduct mental health screenings annually rather than once in a patient's lifetime, allowing them to address issues of trauma and mental illness before they worsen. Health screenings, including mental health screenings, are common across the country and are recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

These screenings are evidence-based, quick and inexpensive to provide, and most pediatricians' offices already use them on a yearly basis. The screenings allowed by the bill would use validated, standardized mental health screening tools that have demonstrated reliability and validity.

HB 1600 would not mandate, but would allow, a physician to provide a mental health screening at each annual Texas Health Steps visit. State Medicaid policy already requires a mental health screening once per lifetime for Medicaid clients ages 12 through 18 in the Texas Health Steps program and allows annual screenings. HB 1600 simply would mirror this policy in statute and allow the Health and Human Services Commission to update its rate setting process to include reimbursement for annual screenings using a validated, standardized tool.

Current law requiring client or parental consent for the Texas Health Steps program would apply to the mental health screenings allowed by the bill. Adding consent language to the bill would be redundant and would create more paperwork for parents and providers. The Texas Health Steps program already allows parents to refuse consent for any component of the program without opting out of the entire program.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

HB 1600's language is unclear and could be interpreted as a mandate that children receive mental health screenings every year, not once in a lifetime. Conducting these screenings frequently could lead to unnecessary treatment or misdiagnosis of psychiatric symptoms in children.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

The existing consent requirement for the Texas Health Steps program does not make it clear to parents that they could opt out of the mental health screening. The bill should specify that parents could decline specific screenings without opting out of the entire program.

NOTES:

A companion bill, SB 817 by Watson, was referred to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee on February 27.