Colorado Medicaid to Lift Restrictions on Hepatitis C Treatment in 2018

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The state of Colorado has decided to lift its current Medicaid restrictions on hepatitis C virus (HCV) treatment in 2018. Starting January 1, HCV-positive patients enrolled in the state's health care program will be able to access next-generation cures whenever they want to, instead of having to wait until they are sick enough to qualify for treatment, The Denver Post reports.

The decision, filed late last week by Colorado's Medicaid department, comes in the midst of a class-action lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Colorado and follows a recommendation from top health officials, who asked the department to lift its restrictive treatment policies. It also comes at a time when the price of hepatitis C treatment has fallen across the country, dropping from $84,000 per patient for a standard 12-week treatment to about $14,000 over the past year.

Colorado's previous policy—like that of other states—required HCV-positive Medicaid recipients to have advanced liver damage before they were able to access lifesaving treatment. But last year, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) warned states that imposing these kinds of restrictions could be illegal and recommended treatment for all people living with hepatitis C. Since then, many states have lifted their restrictions, often in the face of similar lawsuits.

The ACLU of Colorado's legal director immediately commended the state's policy change, calling the new 2018 rule "a major step forward" to both resolving the class-action case and ending the nation's hepatitis C epidemic. For its part, Colorado's Medicaid department says it expects to treat about 20 percent more patients for hepatitis C over the coming year.

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