

1 [Urging Passage of California State Senate Bill No. 221 (Wiener) - Health Care Coverage:
Timely Access to Care]

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3 **Resolution urging passage of California State Senate Bill No. 221, authored by State**
4 **Senator Scott Wiener, to establish clear timely access standards for mental health care**
5 **follow-up appointments needed by patients in ongoing, medically necessary treatment**
6 **for mental health and substance use disorders.**

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8 WHEREAS, In 2020, the California State Legislature passed Senate Bill No. 855 (SB
9 855), which strengthened the California Mental Health Parity Act by expanding coverage for
10 mental health and substance use disorder (MH/SUD) treatment and establishing a standard of
11 no more than 10 days for access to MH/SUD appointments needed by patients; and

12 WHEREAS, SB 855 did not establish similarly clear standards for offering needed
13 follow-up MH/SUD treatment appointments; and

14 WHEREAS, In the absence of clear timely access standards for follow-up
15 appointments with non-physician MH/SUD providers - like social workers and therapists -
16 large numbers of Californians requiring ongoing courses of treatment for mental health and
17 substance use disorders have been unable to access care within the timeframes that are
18 clinically appropriate for their diagnoses; and

19 WHEREAS, According to a December 2020 survey conducted by the National Union of
20 Healthcare Workers, 88% of the mental health therapists at California's largest HMO reported
21 that weekly individual psychotherapy treatment is unavailable for patients who need it, and
22 51% of therapists reported that their patients have to wait more than 4 weeks, on average, for
23 a follow-up appointment; and

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1 WHEREAS, According to the California Health Care Foundation's 2020 survey on the
2 health care priorities and experiences of California residents, 52% of those who tried to make
3 an appointment believe they waited longer than was reasonable to get one; and

4 WHEREAS, According to a 2019 survey by the California Health Care Foundation,
5 Californians ranked access to mental health treatment as the state's top health care priority;
6 and

7 WHEREAS, This problem has been exacerbated by the significant increase in demand
8 for mental health and substance use disorder services driven by the COVID-19 pandemic,
9 with national survey data published in JAMA, an international peer-reviewed general medical
10 journal, showing that the rate of anxiety and depression has more than tripled over the last
11 year, and a recent Center for Disease Control study conducted between April 2020 and March
12 2021 finding that one in four people age 18 to 24 have seriously considered suicide in the past
13 30 days; and

14 WHEREAS, Recent studies indicate that without timely access to follow-up mental
15 health treatment, patients can suffer longer recovery times and worse outcomes including a
16 more chronic course of their disorders; and

17 WHEREAS, Delays in accessing appropriate treatment can lead to increased morbidity
18 and mortality rates, increased time away from work, increased strain on families, increased
19 risk of decompensation, and accelerating crises requiring more costly and intensive care; and

20 WHEREAS, Current law and regulations have been interpreted to require HMOs under
21 the jurisdiction of the Department of Managed Health Care and health insurers under the
22 jurisdiction of the California Department of Insurance to offer enrollees initial appointments
23 with non-physician MH/SUD providers within ten business days, but not to establish similarly
24 clear standards for offering needed follow-up care from these same providers; and

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1 WHEREAS, SB 221 will close the loophole in existing law by detailing an appropriate
2 timely access standard for follow-up appointments with non-physician MH/SUD providers,
3 while giving the treating clinician an option to create alternative timeframes for follow-up
4 appointments when that is warranted; now, therefore, be it

5 RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San Francisco
6 urges the passage of SB 221 to establish clear timely access standards for mental health care
7 follow-up appointments needed by patients in ongoing, medically necessary treatment for
8 mental health and substance use disorders; and, be it

9 FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Board of Supervisors of the City and County of San
10 Francisco further directs the Clerk of the Board to transmit copies of this Resolution to the
11 State Legislature and City Lobbyist upon passage.

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