



December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017

Dear TennCare Provider:

**RESPONDING TO THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC:** As a valued TennCare Provider, we want to make you aware of significant steps TennCare is taking to address the opioid epidemic that is devastating the lives of too many Tennesseans. TennCare has long worked to confront the impacts of opioid misuse and abuse; but we continue to re-examine the complex nature of the crisis. Going forward, we plan to implement additional strategies working closely with our Managed Care Organizations, Pharmacy Benefits Manager, and Dental Benefits Manager. Yet, we strongly believe this epidemic requires multi-agency, multi-sector partnerships, especially with our provider community. In that spirit, we ask you to consider how you can partner with TennCare as we refine and strengthen our approach across three priority areas of focus:

- Reducing the risk of TennCare members becoming newly dependent or addicted to opioids;
- Increasing patient engagement, early detection of dependence, and evidence-based pain treatment for TennCare members chronically using opioids; and
- Supporting high-quality addiction and recovery treatment services for TennCare members who are dependent, misusing, or abusing opioids and other substances

**TENNCARE'S PRIORITIES:** For the first priority area, TennCare will implement policies to increase access to non-opioid analgesics and strengthen existing opioid prescription coverage limits for first-time and non-chronic opioid users. The goal will be to limit risks of opioid misuse for TennCare members that result from prolonged exposure to high doses of opioids associated with acute opioid therapy.

Secondly, it is essential to better educate and engage our members who use opioids chronically in safe and effective pain management. The goal is to gradually reduce the number of TennCare members chronically using high dose opioid therapies for non-life threatening medical conditions. Educating members on the risks of opioid therapy and engaging them to access appropriate care is critical. By connecting members to TennCare's strong primary care and mental health providers, increasing access to appropriate voluntary reversible long-acting contraception (VRLAC), and safely tapering chronic opioid therapy, the unintended consequences from chronic opioid use, such as neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) and opioid use disorder can be reduced.

Lastly, TennCare will work to increase access to high-quality substance and opioid use disorder treatment for our members. The goal is to connect members with opioid and substance use disorder to high-quality treatment thereby reducing opioid-related overdoses and deaths. We will work with our Managed Care Organizations to strengthen their treatment networks for opioid use disorder in order to provide high quality, evidence-based treatment across the continuum of care.

**WATCH FOR A NEW POLICY:** As TennCare moves forward, we are depending on you to join our efforts. TennCare will be communicating further policy and benefit changes in the coming weeks. We are grateful that you have chosen to be a TennCare provider. You are vital to the success of our program and to improving the health of our members affected by the opioid epidemic.

Thank you,

Dr. Wendy Long, MD, MPH  
Director  
Division of TennCare

Dr. Victor Wu, MD, MPH  
Chief Medical Officer  
Division of TennCare