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Wisconsin Addiction and Mental Health Parity Law Signed

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News Summary

A bill requiring group health insurance policies to cover addictions and mental disorders on par with other illnesses has been signed into law by Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle.

Unlike the federal parity law, the Wisconsin bill applies to insurance policies provided by small employers as well as big companies. The measure also eliminates the minimum annual coverage requirements that insurers previously had to provide for these illnesses, according to a press release from Doyle's office.

Bill sponsor Rep. Sandy Pasch said the law is "the start of a lot of things we will have to do," the LaCross Tribune reported May 1. For example, state treatment funding is now directed mainly at big institutions and not community-based programs, hospitals are cutting funding for inpatient psychiatric services, and licensing problems have slowed the entry of new mental-health professionals into the field.

The state legislature is currently holding a series of public hearings to air such problems and develop a course of action following passage of the parity bill.

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