



Na Leo Ola

Newsletter of the Hawaii Medical Association

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Hawaii Supreme Court Grants HMA's and AMA's filing of a Amicus Curiae Brief in Nitta vs. HMSA

On January 30, 2025, the Hawaii Supreme Court granted HMA's and AMA's filing of an amicus curiae brief in the case of Nitta vs. HMSA.

An *amicus curiae* (literally "friend of the court") is someone who is not a party to a case, but offers information that bears on the case, and has not been solicited by any of the parties to assist the court. An *amicus curiae* brief is a text that is sufficiently authoritative in its field to be admissible as evidence in a court, and is a way to introduce concerns ensuring that (the possibly) broad legal effects of a court decision will not depend solely on the parties directly involved in the case.

The decision on whether to admit an amicus curiae brief lies with the court. In this instance, the Hawaii Supreme Court believed that our brief is substantive, and was approved.

As always, HMA stands ready to support Hawaii's physicians and their patients. For the latest on the Nitta vs HMSA case, please visit our website at hawaiimedicalassociation.org.

Executive Director's Message *by Marc Alexander*



Prior authorization (PA) is widely considered as one of the greatest administrative burdens that a physician faces. It takes physicians away from caring for patients, undercuts the financial stability of practices, and contributes significantly to physician burnout. According to the 2023 American Medical Association's survey of physicians, nearly one in four physicians (24%) report that PA has led to a "serious adverse event." Physicians and their staff spend 12 hours each week completing PAs, with 95% of physicians indicating that PA demands "somewhat or significantly increases physician burnout."

HMA's leadership is committed to collaboration and building bridges. We believe that healthcare professionals, hospital systems, administrators, insurers and policymakers must work together to improve the health of Hawaii's people. This is why advocacy is at the center of HMA's mission. Advocacy is primarily with the state legislature, but it also includes engaging healthcare stakeholders outside of the legislative world.

Since last year, HMA leadership, including HMA President **Dr. Elizabeth A. Ignacio**, President Elect **Dr. Nadine Tenn Salle**, and recently the Chair of HMA's Public Policy Committee, **Dr. Jerald Garcia**, have been in discussions with HMSA, Hawaii's largest medical insurance provider, about prior authorization and ways to reduce the burden on physicians and their patients. HMSA has been at the table with their team, including Vice President and Chief Medical Officer **Dr. Stefanie Park**, and Executive Vice President and Chief Health Officer **Dr. Kenric Murayama**. The discussions have been frank yet cordial, and we believe very much for the benefit of physicians and patients, to whom both organizations are clearly committed. We are grateful to HMSA's positive engagement.

As an initial product of these discussions, HMSA wanted to share a statement on prior authorization, including its current practice and its commitments and efforts to improve the process and concretely address needed changes. Together, HMA and HMSA are releasing a one-page summary, *Prior Authorization Reform: Working Collaboratively for a Healthier Hawaii*, along with HMSA's full two-page statement. The summary will appear on page two of this newsletter; to read HMSA's full statement, visit hawaiimedicalassociation.org.

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Prior Authorization Reform

Working Collaboratively for a Healthier Hawaii

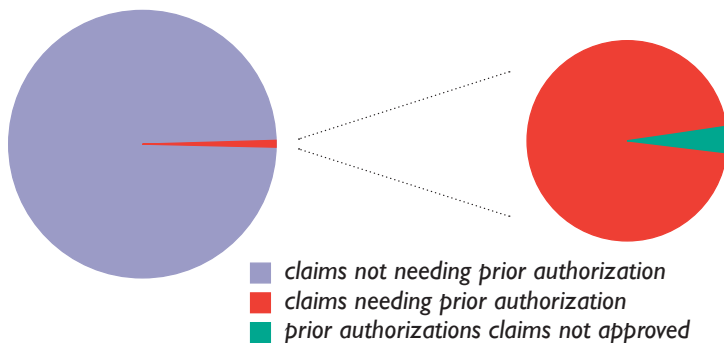
The topic of Prior Authorization has garnered much attention, fueling argument and debate, but few solutions. The Hawaii Medical Association reached out to HMSA - Hawaii's largest medical insurance provider - to engage in a collaborative effort to address prior authorization reform. In response to our request to engage, Stefanie Park, M.D., vice president and chief medical officer at HMSA, released a formal statement on HMSA's current and ongoing work towards prior authorization reform.

Here's a summary of HMSA's statement:

WHY PRIOR AUTHORIZATION?

Prior authorization is the pre-service review of non-emergency medical services and treatments for cost efficacy, safety, and medical appropriateness for a patient's diagnosis. It's an established practice - a standard across the health care industry - designed to keep health care premiums affordable. Prior authorization doesn't apply to emergency care or care that members receive when they're hospitalized for a medical condition.

PRIOR AUTHORIZATION'S CURRENT IMPACT



Of the 17 million claims processed by HMSA in 2024, just 1.2% needed prior authorization.

91.3% of the claims needing prior authorization were approved.

HMSA'S IMMEDIATE COMMITMENT

- Removing prior authorization requirements from frequently approved procedures, like Supportive Care, select Durable Medical Equipment, Bariatric Surgery, and Blepharoplasty.
- Expanding their Fast Pass Program, which waives prior authorization for providers with high levels of adherence to HMSA medical policies.
- Taskforce expansion to address administrative burden.

HMSA'S CONTINUING EFFORTS

- Education to reduce unnecessary submissions
- Fully integrated modernization: phasing out fax requests, encouraging online submissions
- Taskforce working group study to recommend changes

We're grateful to HMSA for their willingness to collaborate in finding solutions to Prior Authorization Reform. By working together, we can continue to create solutions that will ultimately benefit the citizens of Hawaii. To read the entire HMSA statement on Prior Authorization, and to follow our progress on Prior Authorization Reform, visit hawaiimedicalassociation.org.



President's Message

by Elizabeth Ann Ignacio, MD,
FSIR, FACR



Happy New
Year - Hau'oli
makahiki hou!

As we begin
2025, HMA
wants all Hawaii

physicians to look to the New Year with renewed vigor and spirit. We have achieved much together in 2024, and there will be many opportunities to participate and engage with your colleagues on important healthcare issues that matter to you.

Healthcare in Hawaii faces many complex and emerging challenges - Maui recovery, the Hawaii physician shortage, prior authorization delays, behavioral health treatment, scope issues. Addressing the systemic and regulatory barriers to high quality and safe patient care may seem daunting. HMA wants every Hawaii doctor to know that your voice is a strong one, but only if it is heard!

With HMA we can work together, press forward in the legislative process, and connect to stakeholders and policymakers on the important decisions that affect your patients and your practice. Please stand with us and support our focused impactful advocacy and outreach.

Hawaii physicians, start or renew your HMA membership today and make your voices heard in 2025!

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We emphasize that this is only the beginning of our work together to reduce the administrative burden of physicians and the adverse impacts on patients. And this outreach will go beyond HMSA. We are convinced that through this kind of constructive collaboration, with aloha and mutual respect, we will together improve both physician health and practice, and the health and well-being of Hawaii's people.

Hawaii Medical Association 2025 Legislative Priorities

The Hawaii Medical Association (HMA) advocates for physicians, their patients, and public health. We support all Hawaii physicians and believe that the care of patients, commitment to excellence, and the professional bond of organized medicine unite physicians together. HMA represents Hawaii physicians in established and emerging practice types including academics, private practice, hospital based, independent clinics, contractors and telehealth services.

HMA is committed to collaboration and building bridges. Healthcare professionals, hospital systems, administrators, insurers and policymakers must work together to improve the health of Hawaii's people. HMA also navigates the non-legislative world to build consensus among top healthcare stakeholders. Our HMA legislative priorities reflect these commitments. Our legislative pathway includes current clinical standards and best practices, assessment of the local healthcare landscape and political climate, as well as factors of community resources and cost. Our advocacy will remain focused, yet nimble as circumstances evolve.

While our attention is on state legislative issues, we also monitor and selectively engage on national issues, working closely with the American Medical Association (AMA), our national counterpart. HMA has two delegates to the AMA ensuring that Hawaii's voice is strongly represented at the national level.

Here are HMA's legislative priorities for 2025:

Access to Care

According to the 2024 Hawaii Physician Workforce Report, Hawaii has a statewide shortage of 768 full-time physicians, including a shortage of 152 physicians for primary care. As a result, many patients do not receive the care they need and deserve. Action is needed to remove the barriers that make the practice of medicine unfeasible and disadvantageous for both physicians and their patients. A top priority is reforming the prior authorization process, which has been shown to delay or deny life-saving patient care. We need to continue to fund and expand incentives which help to recruit and retain physicians.

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Hawaii Medical Association Legislative Priorities

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Quality Care

All patients deserve high quality care, regardless of their economic status or geographic location. Team-based healthcare led by physicians should be the norm, with non-physician providers offering care within the scope of their training, education, and experience.

Behavioral Health

The 2024 State of Mental Health in America reports that over 78% of Hawaii adults (151,000 individuals) needing substance use disorder treatment, were unable to access such care, ranking Hawaii 37th in the country. Almost 70% of Hawaii's youth (8,000 individuals) who needed mental health treatment for major depression did not receive such treatment, ranking Hawaii 49th in the country. While progress is being made, we support the accelerated improvement and expansion of behavioral health services for mental health conditions and substance use disorders. We also support housing solutions accompanied by comprehensive wrap-around support services for individuals experiencing homelessness. Housing instability is a crucial social determinant of health, and homelessness, substance use disorders, and psychiatric disorders are closely interconnected.

The Hawaii Medical Association looks to continue making progress for Hawaii's physicians by influencing legislation that affect our healthcare environment. The new Hawaii Legislative session opened on January 15, 2025. Of the 3172 bills introduced during this session, HMA is closely tracking 148, which speak to our legislative priorities. Testimonies and the progress of bills are constantly updated on a special page in our Members Only section of our website, "**2025 Session Updates.**" We'll also provide updates via email and in this newsletter. Visit hawaiimedicalassociation.org for the latest latest legislative happenings that affect our physician community and their patients.

As always, if you have legislative ideas or concerns, we'd love to hear from you! Send any thoughts and ideas to HMA executive director **Marc Alexander** at m.alexander@hawaiimedicalassociation.org and to Public Policy Committee Chair **Dr. Jerald Garcia** at j.garcia@hawaiimedicalassociation.org.

2025 Hawaii Medical Association Public Policy Coordination Team

Jerald Garcia, MD - Chair • **Linda Rosehill, JD** - Government Relations
Marc Alexander - Executive Director

Consider a Donation to Help Our Fellow Physicians Impacted by the California Wildfires

The active wildfires in Southern California have destroyed thousands of homes, structures, and medical practices, resulting in many displaced residents, including physician colleagues.

In response, the California Medical Association and Physicians for a Healthy California have launched a donation page to support impacted physicians and their practices. Donations to the Disaster Relief Fund will be used to reestablish the delivery of medical care to areas of California affected by disaster, by providing physicians who are also victims of disaster with financial assistance to help restore their medical practices.

To learn more or to make a donation, visit hawaiimedicalassociation.org.



Save the Date for Ola Pono Ike 2025!

The 26th annual Ola Pono Ike Gala is scheduled for Saturday, October 25, 2025 at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, Coral Ballroom.

Last year's event drew a record crowd, and gave us the opportunity to recognize Dr. Whitney Limm as Physician of the Year, Dr. Tom Kosasa for Lifetime Achievement, and John Henry Felix for his service to our community. The nominations for this year's HMA Awards are in, and we'll announce the winners soon!

It's truly a magical night of celebration for our physician community, so mark your calendars and plan to attend.



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