New State Law Requires Insurers to Cover Lipodystrophy Treatment

A side effect of some HIV meds, lipodystrophy results in a redistribution of fat.

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Massachusetts is the first state to demand that insurers cover treatment for HIV-related lipodystrophy, MassLive.com reports. The state legislature passed the bill earlier this summer and Gov. Charlie Baker signed it 10 days later.

Lipodystrophy is the redistribution of fat—it can be an accumulation or depletion of fat—often in the face, neck and limbs. It is associated with older HIV meds from the 1990s. (For more, read POZ's HIV Basics section on lipodystrophy as well as the POZ Focus "Living With Lipo.")

The new law requires that insurers provide coverage for medical or drug treatments to correct or repair damage to body composition caused by HIV-associated lipodystrophy. This might include surgery, injections or other treatments.

Insurers often deny treatment, claiming it is cosmetic.

A group of doctors wrote to lawmakers to support the bill. "Treatment of lipodystrophy is basic medical care; it is not cosmetic," they wrote. "It is also sound health policy. It is costlier to address the harm of untreated lipodystrophy (e.g., pain medications, physical therapy, psychotherapy) than it is to treat the underlying disease."

Speaking with MassLive.com, Ben Klein, a senior attorney at GLAD, which provides legal services for gay rights issues, said that lipodystrophy remains "one of the most unrecognized issues in the HIV epidemic. Some of our longest-term survivors of the HIV epidemic have been suffering profoundly, silently and invisibly because of medications."

For more details about insurance coverage and treatment, read the GLAD fact sheet "Treatment for Lipodystrophy: It's Now the Law!"

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