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MMCD All Plan Letter 99001

TO: Medi-Cal Managed Care Health Plans

SUBJECT: MANAGED CARE PLAN UTILIZATION OF THERAPEUTIC
             PHARMACEUTICAL AGENTS-CERTIFIED OPTOMETRISTS

Effective February 21, 1996, the scope of practice for certain optometrists was expanded through the enactment of Senate Bill (SB) 668 (Chapter 13, Statutes of 1996) to include performing specified procedures to treat many pathological conditions of the eye and prescribing therapeutic pharmaceutical agents (TPA). Existing statutes in the Business and Professions Code (Section 690) and the Welfare and Institutions Code (Section 14060) require managed care plans (MCPs) to allow members to access either an optometrist or a physician and surgeon for vision care within the scope of the provider's license. These statutes are reflected in current Medi-Cal managed care plan (MCP) contract requirements.

The California Optometric Association has suggested the following situations in which it may be beneficial for Medi-Cal MCPs to utilize TPA-certified optometrists:

- Presentation of eye pathology to a TPA-certified optometrist during the course of a regular eye exam.

- Plan member self-referral to his/her optometrist for an "eye problem."

- Referral to a TPA-certified optometrist from a primary care physician for a routine eye exam at which time the optometrist diagnoses an eye pathology.

- Emergencies (such as a foreign body in the eye).

Currently, some Medi-Cal MCP contracts allow the plan to require a member to access a primary care physician prior to being referred to an optometrist or ophthalmologist for vision care. However, a Medi-Cal MCP may decide that it is beneficial to both the plan member and
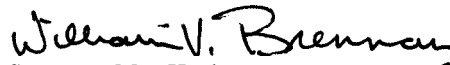
the plan to allow TPA-certified optometrists to resolve problems such as those described above at the time of presentation and to provide a method of reimbursement to the optometrist for the services provided. This timely provision of services could limit the risk of unforeseen complications and would avoid the cost of multiple referrals.

The California Optometric Association has provided the following suggestions for Medi-Cal MCPs for increasing utilization of TPA-certified optometrists within a plan's provider network:

- Increase the number of TPA-certified optometrists in the plan's provider network.

- Designate TPA-certified optometrists who provide medical eye care benefits under the Medi-Cal fee-for-service program as authorized providers for the plan's MCP.

- Urge medical groups that contract with the plan to make arrangements with TPA-certified optometrists to provide medical eye care to plan members.

- Use standing referral orders for plan members to obtain care from TPA-certified optometrists.

- Adopt procedures authorizing necessary follow-up visits for medical eye care with a TPA-certified optometrist who sees a plan member during a regular eye exam.

- Carve-out eye care from the scope of services for plan primary care physicians and establish TPA-certified optometrists as primary eye care providers.

If you have, any questions regarding utilization of TPA-certified optometrists, please contact your contract manager.

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