

## Insurance Company Policies Jeopardize Patient Access to Critical Medications

### The Issue

Patients with life-threatening or chronic conditions often need medications that are infused or injected in an outpatient hospital facility or doctor's office. But a recent change in insurance company practices jeopardizes Californians' health and safety by restricting or delaying access to critical medications.

Although many health care providers keep specialty medications (or their ingredients) in stock so they are readily available for patients, some insurance companies require providers to order medications from a third-party vendor (a practice known as "white bagging"). This means insurance companies, not clinicians, are making decisions for patients. If the vendor is unable to deliver the medication — or the provider determines that the medication was improperly managed, stored, or handled — the patient must return for treatment on a different day. Delaying treatment puts patients' health at risk, can lead to distress, and may impact overall treatment plans.

### What's Needed

CHA's sponsored bill — Senate Bill (SB) 958 — would prevent insurance companies from mandating the use of third-party vendors for specialty medications. While SB 958 would not prohibit this practice, it provides a framework to determine when white bagging is appropriate and for ensuring patient safety and medication integrity.

### 'June's' Story

"June," an 18-year-old patient at Valley Children's Hospital in Madera, has Crohn's disease and requires regular outpatient infusions. But her health plan's medication policies once resulted in an eight-week delay for a vital infusion, even though the hospital had her medication in stock — and despite hospital advocacy on her behalf by the pharmacy, clinic, and patient accounts teams. Because the policy required the hospital to order the medicine from a third-party vendor (2,700 miles away), it was not delivered on time. June was forced to reschedule her appointment.

**"June's" health plan's white bagging policies resulted in an eight-week delay for a vital infusion, even though the hospital had her medication in stock.**

"June's" story is not unique. Across the state, vulnerable and chronically ill patients repeatedly endure delays and distress from this unnecessary policy.

