

## **Important Notice to Providers: New Part D Star Measure – Concurrent Use of Benzodiazepines and Opioids**

Deaths resulting from opioid overdose have more than doubled in the United States over the past decade. In response, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a public health emergency in 2017 as opioid-related fatalities reached crisis levels.

One major contributing factor to this crisis is the concurrent use of benzodiazepines and opioids, which accounts for over 30% of opioid-related deaths. This combination also correlates with increased emergency department visits and inpatient admissions. The risk of overdose death is significantly elevated when opioids and benzodiazepines are prescribed together, increasing more than fivefold within the first 90 days of concurrent use. Avoiding the simultaneous prescribing of these medications could potentially save thousands of lives each year.

It is essential for providers to assess existing patient risks before initiating opioid therapy. Determining appropriate clinical indications for opioid use and thoroughly evaluating the type of pain (e.g., neuropathic vs. nociceptive, acute vs. chronic) can guide the selection of the most effective and safest treatment options. For non-cancer-related chronic pain, non-opioid treatments are generally preferred, with opioid prescriptions reserved for cases where potential benefits outweigh the risks and clear, safe treatment goals are established.

Evidence-based guidelines provide a valuable resource in shaping pain management strategies that maximize safety and efficacy.

**Action Required:** Please re-evaluate your patients who are currently prescribed both opioids and benzodiazepines. The concurrent use of these medications is now recognized as a significant safety concern and is rated as a Star Measure for MY2025.