AMENDED IN SENATE MARCH 29, 2012

SENATE BILL No. 1410

Introduced by Senator Hernandez

February 24, 2012

An act to amend Sections *1374.30,* 1374.32, and 1374.33 of the Health and Safety Code, and to amend Sections *10169,* 10169.2, and 10169.3 of the Insurance Code, relating to health care coverage.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 1410, as amended, Hernandez. Independent medical review.

Existing law provides for licensing and regulation of health care service plans by the Department of Managed Health Care. Existing law provides for licensing and regulation of health insurers by the Insurance Commissioner. Existing law requires the department and the commissioner to establish an independent medical review system under which a patient may seek an independent medical review whenever health care services have been denied, modified, or delayed by a health care service plan or health insurer and the patient has previously filed a grievance that remains unresolved after 30 days. Existing law requires medical professionals selected by an independent medical review organization to review medical treatment decisions to meet certain minimum requirements, including that the medical professional be a clinician knowledgeable in the treatment of the patient's medical condition, knowledgeable about the proposed treatment, and familiar with guidelines and protocols in the area of treatment under review.

This bill would instead require the medical professional to be a clinician expert in the treatment of the enrollee's medical condition and knowledgeable about the proposed treatment through recent or current actual clinical experience treating patients with the same or similar

condition. *This bill would require the application form provided to an enrollee or insured seeking independent review to include a section designed to collect information on the enrollee's or insured's ethnicity, race, and primary language spoken, which would be provided at the option of the enrollee or insured and used only for statistical purposes.*

Existing law requires the Director of Managed Health Care and the Insurance Commissioner to adopt the determination of an independent medical review organization as a director or commissioner decision. Existing law requires the decisions to be made available, on request, to the public at cost. Existing law requires certain information to be removed from the decision, including the name of the health plan.

This bill would require the decisions to be made available at no charge on the Internet Web site of the Department of Managed Health Care or Department of Insurance, as applicable. The bill would delete the requirement to remove the name of the health plan.

This bill would also require the 2 departments to consult with each other regarding the establishment of a common searchable database for these decisions, and would specify the information that is to be made available in that regard.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes. State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. Section 1374.30 of the Health and Safety Code is amended to read:

1374.30. (a) Commencing January 1, 2001, there is hereby established in the department the Independent Medical Review System.

(b) For the purposes of this chapter, "disputed health care service" means any health care service eligible for coverage and payment under a health care service plan contract that has been denied, modified, or delayed by a decision of the plan, or by one of its contracting providers, in whole or in part due to a finding that the service is not medically necessary. A decision regarding a disputed health care service relates to the practice of medicine and is not a coverage decision. A disputed health care service does not include services provided by a specialized health care service plan, except to the extent that the service (1) involves the practice of medicine, or (2) is provided pursuant to a contract with a health

care service plan that covers hospital, medical, or surgical benefits. If a plan, or one of its contracting providers, issues a decision denying, modifying, or delaying health care services, based in whole or in part on a finding that the proposed health care services are not a covered benefit under the contract that applies to the enrollee, the statement of decision shall clearly specify the provision in the contract that excludes that coverage.

(c) For the purposes of this chapter, "coverage decision" means the approval or denial of health care services by a plan, or by one of its contracting entities, substantially based on a finding that the provision of a particular service is included or excluded as a covered benefit under the terms and conditions of the health care service plan contract. A "coverage decision" does not encompass a plan or contracting provider decision regarding a disputed health care service.

(d) (1) All enrollee grievances involving a disputed health care service are eligible for review under the Independent Medical Review System if the requirements of this article are met. If the department finds that an enrollee grievance involving a disputed health care service does not meet the requirements of this article for review under the Independent Medical Review System, the enrollee request for review shall be treated as a request for the department to review the grievance pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 1368. All other enrollee grievances, including grievances involving coverage decisions, remain eligible for review by the department pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 1368.

(2) In any case in which an enrollee or provider asserts that a decision to deny, modify, or delay health care services was based, in whole or in part, on consideration of medical necessity, the department shall have the final authority to determine whether the grievance is more properly resolved pursuant to an independent medical review as provided under this article or pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 1368.

(3) The department shall be the final arbiter when there is a question as to whether an enrollee grievance is a disputed health care service or a coverage decision. The department shall establish a process to complete an initial screening of an enrollee grievance. If there appears to be any medical necessity issue, the grievance shall be resolved pursuant to an independent medical review as

provided under this article or pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 1368.

(e) Every health care service plan contract that is issued, amended, renewed, or delivered in this state on or after January 1, 2000, shall, effective January 1, 2001, provide an enrollee with the opportunity to seek an independent medical review whenever health care services have been denied, modified, or delayed by the plan, or by one of its contracting providers, if the decision was based in whole or in part on a finding that the proposed health care services are not medically necessary. For purposes of this article, an enrollee may designate an agent to act on his or her behalf, as described in paragraph (2) of subdivision (b) of Section 1368. The provider may join with or otherwise assist the enrollee in seeking an independent medical review, and may advocate on behalf of the enrollee.

(f) Medi-Cal beneficiaries enrolled in a health care service plan shall not be excluded from participation. Medicare beneficiaries enrolled in a health care service plan shall not be excluded unless expressly preempted by federal law. Reviews of cases for Medi-Cal enrollees shall be conducted in accordance with statutes and regulations for the Medi-Cal program.

(g) The department may seek to integrate the quality of care and consumer protection provisions, including remedies, of the Independent Medical Review System with related dispute resolution procedures of other health care agency programs, including the Medicare and Medi-Cal programs, in a way that minimizes the potential for duplication, conflict, and added costs. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to limit any rights conferred upon enrollees under this chapter.

(h) The independent medical review process authorized by this article is in addition to any other procedures or remedies that may be available.

(i) No later than January 1, 2001, every health care service plan shall prominently display in every plan member handbook or relevant informational brochure, in every plan contract, on enrollee evidence of coverage forms, on copies of plan procedures for resolving grievances, on letters of denials issued by either the plan or its contracting organization, on the grievance forms required under Section 1368, and on all written responses to grievances, information concerning the right of an enrollee to request an

independent medical review in cases where the enrollee believes that health care services have been improperly denied, modified, or delayed by the plan, or by one of its contracting providers.

(j) An enrollee may apply to the department for an independent medical review when all of the following conditions are met:

(1) (A) The enrollee's provider has recommended a health care service as medically necessary, or

(B) The enrollee has received urgent care or emergency services that a provider determined was medically necessary, or

(C) The enrollee, in the absence of a provider recommendation under subparagraph (A) or the receipt of urgent care or emergency services by a provider under subparagraph (B), has been seen by an in-plan provider for the diagnosis or treatment of the medical condition for which the enrollee seeks independent review. The plan shall expedite access to an in-plan provider upon request of an enrollee. The in-plan provider need not recommend the disputed health care service as a condition for the enrollee to be eligible for an independent review.

For purposes of this article, the enrollee's provider may be an out-of-plan provider. However, the plan shall have no liability for payment of services provided by an out-of-plan provider, except as provided pursuant to subdivision (c) of Section 1374.34.

(2) The disputed health care service has been denied, modified, or delayed by the plan, or by one of its contracting providers, based in whole or in part on a decision that the health care service is not medically necessary.

(3) The enrollee has filed a grievance with the plan or its contracting provider pursuant to Section 1368, and the disputed decision is upheld or the grievance remains unresolved after 30 days. The enrollee shall not be required to participate in the plan's grievance process for more than 30 days. In the case of a grievance that requires expedited review pursuant to Section 1368.01, the enrollee shall not be required to participate in the plan's grievance process for more than three days.

(k) An enrollee may apply to the department for an independent medical review of a decision to deny, modify, or delay health care services, based in whole or in part on a finding that the disputed health care services are not medically necessary, within six months of any of the qualifying periods or events under subdivision (j).

The director may extend the application deadline beyond six months if the circumstances of a case warrant the extension.

(*l*) The enrollee shall pay no application or processing fees of any kind.

(m) As part of its notification to the enrollee regarding a disposition of the enrollee's grievance that denies, modifies, or delays health care services, the plan shall provide the enrollee with a one-page application form approved by the department, and an addressed envelope, which the enrollee may return to initiate an independent medical review. The plan shall include on the form any information required by the department to facilitate the completion of the independent medical review, such as the enrollee's diagnosis or condition, the nature of the disputed health care service sought by the enrollee, a means to identify the enrollee's case, and any other material information. The form shall also include the following:

(1) Notice that a decision not to participate in the independent medical review process may cause the enrollee to forfeit any statutory right to pursue legal action against the plan regarding the disputed health care service.

(2) A statement indicating the enrollee's consent to obtain any necessary medical records from the plan, any of its contracting providers, and any out-of-plan provider the enrollee may have consulted on the matter, to be signed by the enrollee.

(3) Notice of the enrollee's right to provide information or documentation, either directly or through the enrollee's provider, regarding any of the following:

(A) A provider recommendation indicating that the disputed health care service is medically necessary for the enrollee's medical condition.

(B) Medical information or justification that a disputed health care service, on an urgent care or emergency basis, was medically necessary for the enrollee's medical condition.

(C) Reasonable information supporting the enrollee's position that the disputed health care service is or was medically necessary for the enrollee's medical condition, including all information provided to the enrollee by the plan or any of its contracting providers, still in the possession of the enrollee, concerning a plan or provider decision regarding disputed health care services, and a copy of any materials the enrollee submitted to the plan, still in

the possession of the enrollee, in support of the grievance, as well as any additional material that the enrollee believes is relevant.

(4) A section designed to collect information on the enrollee's ethnicity, race, and primary language spoken that includes both of the following:

(A) A statement of intent indicating that the information is used for statistics only, in order to ensure that all enrollees get the best care possible.

(B) A statement indicating that providing this information is optional and will not affect the independent medical review process in any way.

(n) Upon notice from the department that the health care service plan's enrollee has applied for an independent medical review, the plan or its contracting providers shall provide to the independent medical review organization designated by the department a copy of all of the following documents within three business days of the plan's receipt of the department's notice of a request by an enrollee for an independent review:

(1) (A) A copy of all of the enrollee's medical records in the possession of the plan or its contracting providers relevant to each of the following:

(i) The enrollee's medical condition.

(ii) The health care services being provided by the plan and its contracting providers for the condition.

(iii) The disputed health care services requested by the enrollee for the condition.

(B) Any newly developed or discovered relevant medical records in the possession of the plan or its contracting providers after the initial documents are provided to the independent medical review organization shall be forwarded immediately to the independent medical review organization. The plan shall concurrently provide a copy of medical records required by this subparagraph to the enrollee or the enrollee's provider, if authorized by the enrollee, unless the offer of medical records is declined or otherwise prohibited by law. The confidentiality of all medical record information shall be maintained pursuant to applicable state and federal laws.

(2) A copy of all information provided to the enrollee by the plan and any of its contracting providers concerning plan and provider decisions regarding the enrollee's condition and care, and

a copy of any materials the enrollee or the enrollee's provider submitted to the plan and to the plan's contracting providers in support of the enrollee's request for disputed health care services. This documentation shall include the written response to the enrollee's grievance, required by paragraph (4) of subdivision (a) of Section 1368. The confidentiality of any enrollee medical information shall be maintained pursuant to applicable state and federal laws.

(3) A copy of any other relevant documents or information used by the plan or its contracting providers in determining whether disputed health care services should have been provided, and any statements by the plan and its contracting providers explaining the reasons for the decision to deny, modify, or delay disputed health care services on the basis of medical necessity. The plan shall concurrently provide a copy of documents required by this paragraph, except for any information found by the director to be legally privileged information, to the enrollee and the enrollee's provider. The department and the independent review organization shall maintain the confidentiality of any information found by the director to be the proprietary information of the plan.

~~SECTION 1.~~

SEC. 2. Section 1374.32 of the Health and Safety Code is amended to read:

1374.32. (a) The department shall contract with one or more independent medical review organizations in the state to conduct reviews for purposes of this article. The independent medical review organizations shall be independent of any health care service plan doing business in this state. The director may establish additional requirements, including conflict-of-interest standards, consistent with the purposes of this article, that an organization shall be required to meet in order to qualify for participation in the Independent Medical Review System and to assist the department in carrying out its responsibilities.

(b) The independent medical review organizations and the medical professionals retained to conduct reviews shall be deemed to be medical consultants for purposes of Section 43.98 of the Civil Code.

(c) The independent medical review organization, any experts it designates to conduct a review, or any officer, director, or employee of the independent medical review organization shall

not have any material professional, familial, or financial affiliation, as determined by the director, with any of the following:

(1) The plan.

(2) Any officer, director, or employee of the plan.

(3) A physician, the physician's medical group, or the independent practice association involved in the health care service in dispute.

(4) The facility or institution at which either the proposed health care service, or the alternative service, if any, recommended by the plan, would be provided.

(5) The development or manufacture of the principal drug, device, procedure, or other therapy proposed by the enrollee whose treatment is under review, or the alternative therapy, if any, recommended by the plan.

(6) The enrollee or the enrollee's immediate family.

(d) In order to contract with the department for purposes of this article, an independent medical review organization shall meet all of the following requirements:

(1) The organization shall not be an affiliate or a subsidiary of, nor in any way be owned or controlled by, a health plan or a trade association of health plans. A board member, director, officer, or employee of the independent medical review organization shall not serve as a board member, director, or employee of a health care service plan. A board member, director, or officer of a health plan or a trade association of health plans shall not serve as a board member, director, officer, or employee of an independent medical review organization.

(2) The organization shall submit to the department the following information upon initial application to contract for purposes of this article and, except as otherwise provided, annually thereafter upon any change to any of the following information:

(A) The names of all stockholders and owners of more than 5 percent of any stock or options, if a publicly held organization.

(B) The names of all holders of bonds or notes in excess of one hundred thousand dollars ($100,000), if any.

(C) The names of all corporations and organizations that the independent medical review organization controls or is affiliated with, and the nature and extent of any ownership or control, including the affiliated organization's type of business.

(D) The names and biographical sketches of all directors, officers, and executives of the independent medical review organization, as well as a statement regarding any past or present relationships the directors, officers, and executives may have with any health care service plan, disability insurer, managed care organization, provider group, or board or committee of a plan, managed care organization, or provider group.

(E) (i) The percentage of revenue the independent medical review organization receives from expert reviews, including, but not limited to, external medical reviews, quality assurance reviews, and utilization reviews.

(ii) The names of any health care service plan or provider group for which the independent medical review organization provides review services, including, but not limited to, utilization review, quality assurance review, and external medical review. Any change in this information shall be reported to the department within five business days of the change.

(F) A description of the review process including, but not limited to, the method of selecting expert reviewers and matching the expert reviewers to specific cases.

(G) A description of the system the independent medical review organization uses to identify and recruit medical professionals to review treatment and treatment recommendation decisions, the number of medical professionals credentialed, and the types of cases and areas of expertise that the medical professionals are credentialed to review.

(H) A description of how the independent medical review organization ensures compliance with the conflict-of-interest provisions of this section.

(3) The organization shall demonstrate that it has a quality assurance mechanism in place that does the following:

(A) Ensures that the medical professionals retained are appropriately credentialed and privileged.

(B) Ensures that the reviews provided by the medical professionals are timely, clear, and credible, and that reviews are monitored for quality on an ongoing basis.

(C) Ensures that the method of selecting medical professionals for individual cases achieves a fair and impartial panel of medical professionals who are qualified to render recommendations

regarding the clinical conditions and the medical necessity of treatments or therapies in question.

(D) Ensures the confidentiality of medical records and the review materials, consistent with the requirements of this section and applicable state and federal law.

(E) Ensures the independence of the medical professionals retained to perform the reviews through conflict-of-interest policies and prohibitions, and ensures adequate screening for conflicts of interest, pursuant to paragraph (5).

(4) Medical professionals selected by independent medical review organizations to review medical treatment decisions shall be physicians or other appropriate providers who meet the following minimum requirements:

(A) The medical professional shall be a clinician expert in the treatment of the enrollee's medical condition and knowledgeable about the proposed treatment through recent or current actual clinical experience treating patients with the same or a similar medical condition as the enrollee.

(B) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the medical professional shall hold a nonrestricted license in any state of the United States, and for physicians, a current certification by a recognized American medical specialty board in the area or areas appropriate to the condition or treatment under review. The independent medical review organization shall give preference to the use of a physician licensed in California as the reviewer, except when training and experience with the issue under review reasonably requires the use of an out-of-state reviewer.

(C) The medical professional shall have no history of disciplinary action or sanctions, including, but not limited to, loss of staff privileges or participation restrictions, taken or pending by any hospital, government, or regulatory body.

(5) Neither the expert reviewer, nor the independent medical review organization, shall have any material professional, material familial, or material financial affiliation with any of the following:

(A) The plan or a provider group of the plan, except that an academic medical center under contract to the plan to provide services to enrollees may qualify as an independent medical review organization provided it will not provide the service and provided the center is not the developer or manufacturer of the proposed treatment.

(B) Any officer, director, or management employee of the plan.

(C) The physician, the physician's medical group, or the independent practice association (IPA) proposing the treatment.

(D) The institution at which the treatment would be provided.

(E) The development or manufacture of the treatment proposed for the enrollee whose condition is under review.

(F) The enrollee or the enrollee's immediate family.

(6) For purposes of this section, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

(A) "Material familial affiliation" means any relationship as a spouse, child, parent, sibling, spouse's parent, or child's spouse.

(B) "Material professional affiliation" means any physician-patient relationship, any partnership or employment relationship, a shareholder or similar ownership interest in a professional corporation, or any independent contractor arrangement that constitutes a material financial affiliation with any expert or any officer or director of the independent medical review organization. "Material professional affiliation" does not include affiliations that are limited to staff privileges at a health facility.

(C) "Material financial affiliation" means any financial interest of more than 5 percent of total annual revenue or total annual income of an independent medical review organization or individual to which this subdivision applies. "Material financial affiliation" does not include payment by the plan to the independent medical review organization for the services required by this section, nor does "material financial affiliation" include an expert's participation as a contracting plan provider where the expert is affiliated with an academic medical center or a National Cancer Institute-designated clinical cancer research center.

(e) The department shall provide, upon the request of any interested person, a copy of all nonproprietary information, as determined by the director, filed with it by an independent medical review organization seeking to contract under this article. The department may charge a nominal fee to the interested person for photocopying the requested information.

~~SEC. 2.~~

SEC. 3. Section 1374.33 of the Health and Safety Code is amended to read:

1374.33. (a) Upon receipt of information and documents related to a case, the medical professional reviewer or reviewers selected to conduct the review by the independent medical review organization shall promptly review all pertinent medical records of the enrollee, provider reports, as well as any other information submitted to the organization as authorized by the department or requested from any of the parties to the dispute by the reviewers. If reviewers request information from any of the parties, a copy of the request and the response shall be provided to all of the parties. The reviewer or reviewers shall also review relevant information related to the criteria set forth in subdivision (b).

(b) Following its review, the reviewer or reviewers shall determine whether the disputed health care service was medically necessary based on the specific medical needs of the enrollee and any of the following:

(1) Peer-reviewed scientific and medical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the disputed service.

(2) Nationally recognized professional standards.

(3) Expert opinion.

(4) Generally accepted standards of medical practice.

(5) Treatments that are likely to provide a benefit to a patient for conditions for which other treatments are not clinically efficacious.

(c) The organization shall complete its review and make its determination in writing, and in layperson's terms to the maximum extent practicable, within 30 days of the receipt of the application for review and supporting documentation, or within less time as prescribed by the director. If the disputed health care service has not been provided and the enrollee's provider or the department certifies in writing that an imminent and serious threat to the health of the enrollee may exist, including, but not limited to, serious pain, the potential loss of life, limb, or major bodily function, or the immediate and serious deterioration of the health of the enrollee, the analyses and determinations of the reviewers shall be expedited and rendered within three days of the receipt of the information. Subject to the approval of the department, the deadlines for analyses and determinations involving both regular and expedited reviews may be extended by the director for up to three days in extraordinary circumstances or for good cause.

(d) The medical professionals' analyses and determinations shall state whether the disputed health care service is medically necessary. Each analysis shall cite the enrollee's medical condition, the relevant documents in the record, and the relevant findings associated with the provisions of subdivision (b) to support the determination. If more than one medical professional reviews the case, the recommendation of the majority shall prevail. If the medical professionals reviewing the case are evenly split as to whether the disputed health care service should be provided, the decision shall be in favor of providing the service.

(e) The independent medical review organization shall provide the director, the plan, the enrollee, and the enrollee's provider with the analyses and determinations of the medical professionals reviewing the case, and a description of the qualifications of the medical professionals. The independent medical review organization shall keep the names of the reviewers confidential in all communications with entities or individuals outside the independent medical review organization, except in cases where the reviewer is called to testify and in response to court orders. If more than one medical professional reviewed the case and the result was differing determinations, the independent medical review organization shall provide each of the separate reviewer's analyses and determinations.

(f) The director shall immediately adopt the determination of the independent medical review organization, and shall promptly issue a written decision to the parties that shall be binding on the plan.

(g) After removing the name of the enrollee, the names of all medical providers, the names of the health care service plan's employees or contractors, and the name of any other party, other than the plan, director decisions adopting a determination of an independent medical review organization shall be made available by the department to the public on the department's Internet Web site, after considering applicable laws governing disclosure of public records, confidentiality, and personal privacy. Pursuant to this requirement, the department shall consult with and coordinate with the Department of Insurance in the planning and implementation of a common, searchable database that contains information about each director and Insurance Commissioner decision pursuant to subdivision (h).

(h) (1) Information regarding each director and commissioner decision provided by the database referenced in subdivision (g) shall include all of the following:

(A) Enrollee or insured demographic profile information, including age~~,~~ *and* gender~~, and ethnicity~~.

(B) The enrollee or insured diagnosis and disputed health care service.

(C) The name of the health care service plan or health insurer.

~~(B)~~

(D) The department that contracted the independent medical review organization that made the determination.

(E) Whether the independent medical review was for medically necessary services pursuant to this article or for experimental or investigational therapies pursuant to Section 1370.4.

(F) Whether the independent medical review was standard or expedited.

~~(C)~~

(G) Length of time ~~to complete the independent medical review~~ *from the receipt by the independent review organization of the application for review and supporting documentation to the rendering of a determination by the independent review organization in writing*.

(H) Length of time from receipt by the department of the independent medical review application to the issuance of the director's or commissioner's determination in writing to the parties that is binding on the health care service plan or health insurer.

~~(D)~~

(I) Credentials and qualifications of the reviewer *or reviewers*.

~~(E)~~

(J) The nature of the statutory criteria set forth in subdivision (b) that the reviewer *or reviewers* used to make the case decision.

(K) The final result of the determination.

(L) The year the determination was made.

~~(F)~~

(M) A detailed case summary that includes the specific standards, criteria, and medical and scientific evidence, if any, that led to the case decision.

(2) The database referenced in subdivision (g) shall ~~also include both~~ *be accompanied by all* of the following:

(A) The annual rate of independent medical review among the total *enrolled and* insured population.

(B) The annual rate of independent medical review cases by health care service plan or health insurer.

~~(B)~~

(C) The number, type, and resolution of independent medical review cases by health *care service* plan *or health insurer*.

(D) The number, type, and resolution of independent medical review cases by ethnicity, race, and primary language spoken.

SEC. 4. Section 10169 of the Insurance Code is amended to read:

10169. (a) Commencing January 1, 2001, there is hereby established in the department the Independent Medical Review System.

(b) For the purposes of this chapter, "disputed health care service" means any health care service eligible for coverage and payment under a disability insurance contract that has been denied, modified, or delayed by a decision of the insurer, or by one of its contracting providers, in whole or in part due to a finding that the service is not medically necessary. A decision regarding a disputed health care service relates to the practice of medicine and is not a coverage decision. A disputed health care service does not include services provided by a group or individual policy of vision-only or dental-only coverage, except to the extent that (1) the service involves the practice of medicine, or (2) is provided pursuant to a contract with a disability insurer that covers hospital, medical, or surgical benefits. If an insurer, or one of its contracting providers, issues a decision denying, modifying, or delaying health care services, based in whole or in part on a finding that the proposed health care services are not a covered benefit under the contract that applies to the insured, the statement of decision shall clearly specify the provision in the contract that excludes that coverage.

(c) For the purposes of this chapter, "coverage decision" means the approval or denial of health care services by a disability insurer, or by one of its contracting entities, substantially based on a finding that the provision of a particular service is included or excluded as a covered benefit under the terms and conditions of the disability insurance contract. A coverage decision does not encompass a disability insurer or contracting provider decision regarding a disputed health care service.

(d) (1) All insured grievances involving a disputed health care service are eligible for review under the Independent Medical Review System if the requirements of this article are met. If the department finds that an insured grievance involving a disputed health care service does not meet the requirements of this article for review under the Independent Medical Review System, the insured request for review shall be treated as a request for the department to review the grievance. All other insured grievances, including grievances involving coverage decisions, remain eligible for review by the department.

(2) In any case in which an insured or provider asserts that a decision to deny, modify, or delay health care services was based, in whole or in part, on consideration of medical necessity, the department shall have the final authority to determine whether the grievance is more properly resolved pursuant to an independent medical review as provided under this article.

(3) The department shall be the final arbiter when there is a question as to whether an insured grievance is a disputed health care service or a coverage decision. The department shall establish a process to complete an initial screening of an insured grievance. If there appears to be any medical necessity issue, the grievance shall be resolved pursuant to an independent medical review as provided under this article.

(e) Every disability insurance contract that is issued, amended, renewed, or delivered in this state on or after January 1, 2000, shall, effective, January 1, 2001, provide an insured with the opportunity to seek an independent medical review whenever health care services have been denied, modified, or delayed by the insurer, or by one of its contracting providers, if the decision was based in whole or in part on a finding that the proposed health care services are not medically necessary. For purposes of this article, an insured may designate an agent to act on his or her behalf. The provider may join with or otherwise assist the insured in seeking an independent medical review, and may advocate on behalf of the insured.

(f) Medicare beneficiaries enrolled in Medicare + Choice products shall not be excluded unless expressly preempted by federal law.

(g) The department may seek to integrate the quality of care and consumer protection provisions, including remedies, of the

Independent Medical Review System with related dispute resolution procedures of other health care agency programs, including the Medicare program, in a way that minimizes the potential for duplication, conflict, and added costs. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to limit any rights conferred upon insureds under this chapter.

(h) The independent medical review process authorized by this article is in addition to any other procedures or remedies that may be available.

(i) No later than January 1, 2001, every disability insurer shall prominently display in every insurer member handbook or relevant informational brochure, in every insurance contract, on insured evidence of coverage forms, on copies of insurer procedures for resolving grievances, on letters of denials issued by either the insurer or its contracting organization, and on all written responses to grievances, information concerning the right of an insured to request an independent medical review in cases where the insured believes that health care services have been improperly denied, modified, or delayed by the insurer, or by one of its contracting providers.

(j) An insured may apply to the department for an independent medical review when all of the following conditions are met:

(1) (A) The insured's provider has recommended a health care service as medically necessary, or

(B) The insured has received urgent care or emergency services that a provider determined was medically necessary, or

(C) The insured, in the absence of a provider recommendation under subparagraph (A) or the receipt of urgent care or emergency services by a provider under subparagraph (B), has been seen by a contracting provider for the diagnosis or treatment of the medical condition for which the insured seeks independent review. The insurer shall expedite access to a contracting provider upon request of an insured. The contracting provider need not recommend the disputed health care service as a condition for the insured to be eligible for an independent review.

For purposes of this article, the insured's provider may be a noncontracting provider. However, the insurer shall have no liability for payment of services provided by a noncontracting provider, except as provided pursuant to Section 10169.3.

(2) The disputed health care service has been denied, modified, or delayed by the insurer, or by one of its contracting providers, based in whole or in part on a decision that the health care service is not medically necessary.

(3) The insured has filed a grievance with the insurer or its contracting provider, and the disputed decision is upheld or the grievance remains unresolved after 30 days. The insured shall not be required to participate in the insurer's grievance process for more than 30 days. In the case of a grievance that requires expedited review, the insured shall not be required to participate in the insurer's grievance process for more than three days.

(k) An insured may apply to the department for an independent medical review of a decision to deny, modify, or delay health care services, based in whole or in part on a finding that the disputed health care services are not medically necessary, within six months of any of the qualifying periods or events under subdivision (j). The commissioner may extend the application deadline beyond six months if the circumstances of a case warrant the extension.

(*l*) The insured shall pay no application or processing fees of any kind.

(m) As part of its notification to the insured regarding a disposition of the insured's grievance that denies, modifies, or delays health care services, the insurer shall provide the insured with a one-page application form approved by the department, and an addressed envelope, which the insured may return to initiate an independent medical review. The insurer shall include on the form any information required by the department to facilitate the completion of the independent medical review, such as the insured's diagnosis or condition, the nature of the disputed health care service sought by the insured, a means to identify the insured's case, and any other material information. The form shall also include the following:

(1) Notice that a decision not to participate in the independent review process may cause the insured to forfeit any statutory right to pursue legal action against the insurer regarding the disputed health care service.

(2) A statement indicating the insured's consent to obtain any necessary medical records from the insurer, any of its contracting providers, and any noncontracting provider the insured may have consulted on the matter, to be signed by the insured.

(3) Notice of the insured's right to provide information or documentation, either directly or through the insured's provider, regarding any of the following:

(A) A provider recommendation indicating that the disputed health care service is medically necessary for the insured's medical condition.

(B) Medical information or justification that a disputed health care service, on an urgent care or emergency basis, was medically necessary for the insured's medical condition.

(C) Reasonable information supporting the insured's position that the disputed health care service is or was medically necessary for the insured's medical condition, including all information provided to the insured by the insurer or any of its contracting providers, still in the possession of the insured, concerning an insurer or provider decision regarding disputed health care services, and a copy of any materials the insured submitted to the insurer, still in the possession of the insured, in support of the grievance, as well as any additional material that the insured believes is relevant.

(4) A section designed to collect information on the insured's ethnicity, race, and primary language spoken that includes both of the following:

(A) A statement of intent indicating that the information is used for statistics only, in order to ensure that all insureds get the best care possible.

(B) A statement indicating that providing this information is optional and will not affect the independent medical review process in any way.

(n) Upon notice from the department that the insured has applied for an independent medical review, the insurer or its contracting providers, shall provide to the independent medical review organization designated by the department a copy of all of the following documents within three business days of the insurer's receipt of the department's notice of a request by an insured for an independent review:

(1) (A) A copy of all of the insured's medical records in the possession of the insurer or its contracting providers relevant to each of the following:

(i) The insured's medical condition.

(ii) The health care services being provided by the insurer and its contracting providers for the condition.

(iii) The disputed health care services requested by the insured for the condition.

(B) Any newly developed or discovered relevant medical records in the possession of the insurer or its contracting providers after the initial documents are provided to the independent medical review organization shall be forwarded immediately to the independent medical review organization. The insurer shall concurrently provide a copy of medical records required by this subparagraph to the insured or the insured's provider, if authorized by the insured, unless the offer of medical records is declined or otherwise prohibited by law. The confidentiality of all medical record information shall be maintained pursuant to applicable state and federal laws.

(2) A copy of all information provided to the insured by the insurer and any of its contracting providers concerning insurer and provider decisions regarding the insured's condition and care, and a copy of any materials the insured or the insured's provider submitted to the insurer and to the insurer's contracting providers in support of the insured's request for disputed health care services. This documentation shall include the written response to the insured's grievance. The confidentiality of any insured medical information shall be maintained pursuant to applicable state and federal laws.

(3) A copy of any other relevant documents or information used by the insurer or its contracting providers in determining whether disputed health care services should have been provided, and any statements by the insurer and its contracting providers explaining the reasons for the decision to deny, modify, or delay disputed health care services on the basis of medical necessity. The insurer shall concurrently provide a copy of documents required by this paragraph, except for any information found by the commissioner to be legally privileged information, to the insured and the insured's provider. The department and the independent review organization shall maintain the confidentiality of any information found by the commissioner to be the proprietary information of the insurer.

~~SEC. 3.~~

SEC. 5. Section 10169.2 of the Insurance Code is amended to read:

10169.2. (a) The department shall contract with one or more independent medical review organizations in the state to conduct reviews for purposes of this article. The independent medical review organizations shall be independent of any disability insurer doing business in this state. The commissioner may establish additional requirements, including conflict-of-interest standards, consistent with the purposes of this article, that an organization shall be required to meet in order to qualify for participation in the Independent Medical Review System and to assist the department in carrying out its responsibilities.

(b) The independent medical review organizations and the medical professionals retained to conduct reviews shall be deemed to be medical consultants for purposes of Section 43.98 of the Civil Code.

(c) The independent medical review organization, any experts it designates to conduct a review, or any officer, director, or employee of the independent medical review organization shall not have any material professional, familial, or financial affiliation, as determined by the commissioner, with any of the following:

(1) The insurer.

(2) Any officer, director, or employee of the insurer.

(3) A physician, the physician's medical group, or the independent practice association involved in the health care service in dispute.

(4) The facility or institution at which either the proposed health care service, or the alternative service, if any, recommended by the insurer, would be provided.

(5) The development or manufacture of the principal drug, device, procedure, or other therapy proposed by the insured whose treatment is under review, or the alternative therapy, if any, recommended by the insurer.

(6) The insured or the insured's immediate family.

(d) In order to contract with the department for purposes of this article, an independent medical review organization shall meet all of the following requirements:

(1) The organization shall not be an affiliate or a subsidiary of, nor in any way be owned or controlled by, a disability insurer or a trade association of insurers. A board member, director, officer, or employee of the independent medical review organization shall not serve as a board member, director, or employee of a disability

insurer. A board member, director, or officer of a disability insurer or a trade association of insurers shall not serve as a board member, director, officer, or employee of an independent medical review organization.

(2) The organization shall submit to the department the following information upon initial application to contract for purposes of this article and, except as otherwise provided, annually thereafter upon any change to any of the following information:

(A) The names of all stockholders and owners of more than 5 percent of any stock or options, if a publicly held organization.

(B) The names of all holders of bonds or notes in excess of one hundred thousand dollars ($100,000), if any.

(C) The names of all corporations and organizations that the independent medical review organization controls or is affiliated with, and the nature and extent of any ownership or control, including the affiliated organization's type of business.

(D) The names and biographical sketches of all directors, officers, and executives of the independent medical review organization, as well as a statement regarding any past or present relationships the directors, officers, and executives may have with any health care service plan, disability insurer, managed care organization, provider group, or board or committee of an insurer, a plan, a managed care organization, or a provider group.

(E) (i) The percentage of revenue the independent medical review organization receives from expert reviews, including, but not limited to, external medical reviews, quality assurance reviews, and utilization reviews.

(ii) The names of any insurer or provider group for which the independent medical review organization provides review services, including, but not limited to, utilization review, quality assurance review, and external medical review. Any change in this information shall be reported to the department within five business days of the change.

(F) A description of the review process including, but not limited to, the method of selecting expert reviewers and matching the expert reviewers to specific cases.

(G) A description of the system the independent medical review organization uses to identify and recruit medical professionals to review treatment and treatment recommendation decisions, the number of medical professionals credentialed, and the types of

cases and areas of expertise that the medical professionals are credentialed to review.

(H) A description of how the independent medical review organization ensures compliance with the conflict-of-interest provisions of this section.

(3) The organization shall demonstrate that it has a quality assurance mechanism in place that does the following:

(A) Ensures that the medical professionals retained are appropriately credentialed and privileged.

(B) Ensures that the reviews provided by the medical professionals are timely, clear, and credible, and that reviews are monitored for quality on an ongoing basis.

(C) Ensures that the method of selecting medical professionals for individual cases achieves a fair and impartial panel of medical professionals who are qualified to render recommendations regarding the clinical conditions and the medical necessity of treatments or therapies in question.

(D) Ensures the confidentiality of medical records and the review materials, consistent with the requirements of this section and applicable state and federal law.

(E) Ensures the independence of the medical professionals retained to perform the reviews through conflict-of-interest policies and prohibitions, and ensures adequate screening for conflicts of interest, pursuant to paragraph (5).

(4) Medical professionals selected by independent medical review organizations to review medical treatment decisions shall be physicians or other appropriate providers who meet the following minimum requirements:

(A) The medical professional shall be a clinician expert in the treatment of the insured's medical condition and knowledgeable about the proposed treatment through recent or current actual clinical experience treating patients with the same or a similar medical condition as the insured.

(B) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the medical professional shall hold a nonrestricted license in ~~the~~ any state of the United States, and for physicians, a current certification by a recognized American medical specialty board in the area or areas appropriate to the condition or treatment under review. The independent medical review organization shall give preference to the use of a physician licensed in California as the reviewer, except

when training and experience with the issue under review reasonably requires the use of an out-of-state reviewer.

(C) The medical professional shall have no history of disciplinary action or sanctions, including, but not limited to, loss of staff privileges or participation restrictions, taken or pending by any hospital, government, or regulatory body.

(5) Neither the expert reviewer, nor the independent medical review organization, shall have any material professional, material familial, or material financial affiliation with any of the following:

(A) The disability insurer or a provider group of the insurer, except that an academic medical center under contract to the insurer to provide services to insureds may qualify as an independent medical review organization provided it will not provide the service and provided the center is not the developer or manufacturer of the proposed treatment.

(B) Any officer, director, or management employee of the insurer.

(C) The physician, the physician's medical group, or the independent practice association (IPA) proposing the treatment.

(D) The institution at which the treatment would be provided.

(E) The development or manufacture of the treatment proposed for the insured whose condition is under review.

(F) The insured or the insured's immediate family.

(6) For purposes of this section, the following terms shall have the following meanings:

(A) "Material familial affiliation" means any relationship as a spouse, child, parent, sibling, spouse's parent, or child's spouse.

(B) "Material professional affiliation" means any physician-patient relationship, any partnership or employment relationship, a shareholder or similar ownership interest in a professional corporation, or any independent contractor arrangement that constitutes a material financial affiliation with any expert or any officer or director of the independent medical review organization. "Material professional affiliation" does not include affiliations that are limited to staff privileges at a health facility.

(C) "Material financial affiliation" means any financial interest of more than 5 percent of total annual revenue or total annual income of an independent medical review organization or individual to which this subdivision applies. "Material financial

affiliation" does not include payment by the insurer to the independent medical review organization for the services required by this section, nor does "material financial affiliation" include an expert's participation as a contracting provider where the expert is affiliated with an academic medical center or a National Cancer Institute-designated clinical cancer research center.

(e) The department shall provide, upon the request of any interested person, a copy of all nonproprietary information, as determined by the commissioner, filed with it by an independent medical review organization seeking to contract under this article. The department may charge a nominal fee to the interested person for photocopying the requested information.

(f) The commissioner may contract with the Department of Managed Health Care to administer the independent medical review process established by this article.

~~SEC. 4.~~

SEC. 6. Section 10169.3 of the Insurance Code is amended to read:

10169.3. (a) Upon receipt of information and documents related to a case, the medical professional reviewer or reviewers selected to conduct the review by the independent medical review organization shall promptly review all pertinent medical records of the insured, provider reports, as well as any other information submitted to the organization as authorized by the department or requested from any of the parties to the dispute by the reviewers. If reviewers request information from any of the parties, a copy of the request and the response shall be provided to all of the parties. The reviewer or reviewers shall also review relevant information related to the criteria set forth in subdivision (b).

(b) Following its review, the reviewer or reviewers shall determine whether the disputed health care service was medically necessary based on the specific medical needs of the insured and any of the following:

~~(A)~~

(1) Peer-reviewed scientific and medical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the disputed service.

~~(B)~~

(2) Nationally recognized professional standards.

~~(C)~~

(3) Expert opinion.

~~(D)~~

(4) Generally accepted standards of medical practice.

~~(E)~~

(5) Treatments that are likely to provide a benefit to a patient for conditions for which other treatments are not clinically efficacious.

(c) The organization shall complete its review and make its determination in writing, and in layperson's terms to the maximum extent practicable, within 30 days of the receipt of the application for review and supporting documentation, or within less time as prescribed by the commissioner. If the disputed health care service has not been provided and the insured's provider or the department certifies in writing that an imminent and serious threat to the health of the insured may exist, including, but not limited to, serious pain, the potential loss of life, limb, or major bodily function, or the immediate and serious deterioration of the health of the insured, the analyses and determinations of the reviewers shall be expedited and rendered within three days of the receipt of the information. Subject to the approval of the department, the deadlines for analyses and determinations involving both regular and expedited reviews may be extended by the commissioner for up to three days in extraordinary circumstances or for good cause.

(d) The medical professionals' analyses and determinations shall state whether the disputed health care service is medically necessary. Each analysis shall cite the insured's medical condition, the relevant documents in the record, and the relevant findings associated with the provisions of subdivision (b) to support the determination. If more than one medical professional reviews the case, the recommendation of the majority shall prevail. If the medical professionals reviewing the case are evenly split as to whether the disputed health care service should be provided, the decision shall be in favor of providing the service.

(e) The independent medical review organization shall provide the director, the insurer, the insured, and the insured's provider with the analyses and determinations of the medical professionals reviewing the case, and a description of the qualifications of the medical professionals. The independent medical review organization shall keep the names of the reviewers confidential in all communications with entities or individuals outside the independent medical review organization, except in cases where

the reviewer is called to testify and in response to court orders. If more than one medical professional reviewed the case and the result was differing determinations, the independent medical review organization shall provide each of the separate reviewer's analyses and determinations.

(f) The commissioner shall immediately adopt the determination of the independent medical review organization, and shall promptly issue a written decision to the parties that shall be binding on the insurer.

(g) After removing the name of the insured, the names of all medical providers, the names of the insurer's employees or contractors, and the name of any other party, other than the ~~health plan~~ *insurer*, commissioner decisions adopting a determination of an independent medical review organization shall be made available by the department on the department's Internet Web site, after considering applicable laws governing disclosure of public records, confidentiality, and personal privacy. Pursuant to this requirement, the department shall consult with and coordinate with the Department of Managed Health Care in the planning and implementation of a common, searchable database that contains information about each commissioner and Director of Managed Health Care decision pursuant to subdivision (h).

(h) (1) Information regarding each commissioner and director decision provided by the database referenced in subdivision (g) shall include all of the following:

(A) Insured or enrollee demographic profile information, including age~~,~~ *and* gender~~, and ethnicity~~.

(B) The enrollee or insured diagnosis and disputed health care service.

(C) The name of the health care service plan or health insurer.

~~(B)~~

(D) The department that contracted the independent medical review organization that made the determination.

(E) Whether the independent medical review was for medically necessary services pursuant to this article or for experimental or investigational therapies pursuant to Section 10145.3.

(F) Whether the independent medical review was standard or expedited.

~~(C)~~

(G) Length of time ~~to complete the independent medical review~~ *from the receipt by the independent review organization of the application for review and supporting documentation to the rendering of a determination by the independent review organization in writing*.

(H) Length of time from receipt by the department of the independent medical review application to the issuance of the director's or commissioner's determination in writing to the parties that is binding on the health care service plan or health insurer.

~~(D)~~

(I) Credentials and qualifications of the reviewer *or reviewers*.

~~(E)~~

(J) The nature of the statutory criteria set forth in subdivision (b) that the reviewer *or reviewers* used to make the case decision.

(K) The final result of the determination.

(L) The year the determination was made.

~~(F)~~

(M) A detailed case summary that includes the specific standards, criteria, and medical and scientific evidence, if any, that led to the case decision.

(2) The database referenced in subdivision (g) shall ~~also include both~~ *be accompanied by all* of the following:

(A) The annual rate of independent medical review among the total *enrolled and* insured population.

(B) The annual rate of independent medical review cases by health care service plan or health insurer.

~~(B)~~

(C) The number, type, and resolution of independent medical review cases by health *care service* plan *or health insurer*.

(D) The number, type, and resolution of independent medical review cases by ethnicity, race, and primary language spoken.

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