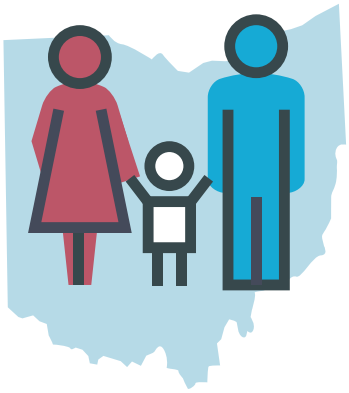
Prior Authorization and Gold Carding

Ohio Association of Health Plans
oahp.org

Frequently Asked Questions

April 2025



What is Prior Authorization?

Prior authorization is one of the many tools health insurers use to promote safe, timely, evidence-based, affordable, and efficient care.

Prior Authorization is an important tool that **ensures that the care patients receive is safe, effective, and affordable.**

Why is Prior Authorization used?

Under the supervision of a medical professional, prior authorization can reduce inappropriate care by catching unsafe or low-value care and targeting where care may not be consistent with the latest clinical evidence — both of which can contribute to potential harm to patients and unnecessary costs.[1]

What is Gold Carding?

A gold card is a program some health insurers implement which exempts specific providers from prior authorization requirements if they have met specific performance measures. The performance measures ensure that a patient's care continues to be safe, effective, and affordable.

Why do some Health Plans have Gold Carding Programs?

In Ohio some health insurers have independently developed gold carding programs as a tool to attract and retain the best performing providers to their networks. Ultimately health insurers compete with each other for those providers, so having a gold carding program can be a competitive advantage.

Why not have blanket Gold Carding programs?

Gold carding programs aren't right for every situation. According to AHIP, gold carding programs work better for services where there are clear and consistent clinical standard of care and there are frequent reviews of providers. Some reported negatives of gold carding programs include: reduced quality of care for patients, higher costs, and difficulty to implement.[2]

What legislation has already passed in Ohio?

In the 131st General Assembly, Sub. S.B. 129 was passed.[3] This overhauled the prior authorization process and requirements in Ohio, with changes primarily aimed at health insurers. Among other matters the bill added time requirements, certain electronic process requirements, and imposed penalties for health insurers.

1 https://www.ahip.org/prior-authorization-helping-patients-receive-safe-effective-and-appropriate-care

2 https://ahiporg-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/202207-AHIP_1P_Gold_Carding_Survey_Results.pdf

3 https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-documents?id=GA131-SB-129

Bottom line:

Prior authorization is a necessary tool to ensure patient's care is safe, effective, and affordable. However, due to Ohio's competitive health insurance marketplace, many health insurers are proactively working to improve the prior authorization process for providers with programs like gold cards.