Insurance coverage for acupuncture up from 2010 to 2019

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(HealthDay)—Insurance coverage for acupuncturist visits increased
from 2010 to 2019, but most costs are paid out of pocket, according to a research letter published online Jan. 12 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Molly Candon, Ph.D., from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, and colleagues examined insurance coverage for acupuncturist visits between 2010 and 2019 using data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey.

The researchers found that the proportion of respondents (mean age, 51.9 years) with at least one acupuncturist visit increased from 0.4 percent in 2010 to 0.8 percent in 2019. The total mean annual amount paid for acupuncturist visits grew significantly ($593.00 in 2010-2011 and $1,021.57 in 2018-2019). Changes in the annual amount paid out of pocket increased by a nonsignificant mean difference of $179 during the study period. An increase in acupuncturist visits among users (mean 5.4 visits per person in 2010 to 8.2 visits per person in 2019) accounted for the increase in spending. There was an increase seen in the share of acupuncturist visits with any insurance coverage from a mean of 41.1 percent in 2010-2011 to 50.2 percent in 2018-2019, while the percentage paid out of pocket declined (mean difference, −9.4 percentage points).

"Insurers should be encouraged to cover safe, low-cost, and evidence-based approaches to comprehensive pain care, including acupuncture therapy," the authors write.


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