

## **esketamine (Spravato<sup>™</sup>)**

**Policy # 00681**

Original Effective Date: 07/18/2019

Current Effective Date: 04/01/2026

*Applies to all products administered or underwritten by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Louisiana and its subsidiary, HMO Louisiana, Inc. (collectively referred to as the "Company"), unless otherwise provided in the applicable contract. Medical technology is constantly evolving, and we reserve the right to review and update Medical Policy periodically.*

*Investigational or experimental services are not covered. This includes any drug, device, procedure, or service provided under the investigational arm of a clinical trial or clinical study. These services are excluded from coverage under benefits.*

*Note: Intravenous anesthetics for the treatment of chronic pain and psychiatric disorders are addressed separately in medical policy 00463.*

## **When Services May Be Eligible for Coverage**

*Coverage for eligible medical treatments or procedures, drugs, devices or biological products may be provided only if:*

- *Benefits are available in the member's contract/certificate, and*
- *Medical necessity criteria and guidelines are met.*

Based on review of available data, the Company may consider esketamine (Spravato<sup>™</sup>)<sup>‡</sup> for the treatment of major depressive disorder to be **eligible for coverage.\*\***

### Patient Selection Criteria

Coverage eligibility for esketamine (Spravato) will be considered when the following criteria are met:

#### **Initial**

- Patient is greater than or equal to 18 years of age; AND
- Patient has a diagnosis of major depressive disorder as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria; AND
- Patient meets ONE of the following:
  - Patient has a diagnosis of treatment-resistant depression confirmed by trial and failure of more than one antidepressant from at least 2 different classes for at least 8 weeks each. (see policy background information for alternative antidepressants with classes); OR
  - Patient has active suicidal ideation and intent and will use Spravato in combination with an oral antidepressant; AND
- Requested dose is less than or equal to 84 mg administered less than or equal to twice per week.

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### Continuation

- Patient has received an initial authorization for Spravato for treatment resistant depression; AND
- Patient has had improvement in depressive symptoms as determined by the prescribing physician; AND  
(Note: This specific patient criterion is an additional company requirement for coverage eligibility and will be denied as not medically necessary\*\* if not met.)
- Requested dose is less than or equal to 84 mg administered less than or equal to twice per week.

## When Services Are Considered Not Medically Necessary

Based on review of available data, the Company considers the continued use of esketamine (Spravato) when the patient has not demonstrated an improvement in depressive symptoms to be **not medically necessary.\*\***

## When Services Are Considered Investigational

Coverage is not available for investigational medical treatments or procedures, drugs, devices or biological products.

Based on review of available data, the Company considers esketamine (Spravato) when the patient selection criteria are not met (except those denoted above as **not medically necessary\*\***) to be **investigational.\***

## Policy Guidelines

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5):

|   |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A | Five or more symptoms for 2 weeks (one of which must be either depressed mood or anhedonia) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Depressed mood most of the day nearly every day</li><li>2. Anhedonia most of the day nearly every day</li><li>3. Significant weight loss or gain</li><li>4. Insomnia or hypersomnia</li><li>5. Psychomotor agitation or retardation</li><li>6. Fatigue or loss of energy</li><li>7. Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt</li><li>8. Diminished ability to think or concentrate; indecisiveness</li><li>9. Recurrent thoughts of death; suicidal ideation or attempt</li></ol> |
| B | Symptoms cause clinically significant distress or functional impairment                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

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|   |                                                                                                          |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| C | The episode is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance or another medical condition |
| D | The episode is not better explained by a psychotic illness                                               |
| E | There has never been a manic or hypomanic episode                                                        |

### **Common Depression Rating Scales**

#### **Montgomery-Asberg Depression Rating Scale (MADRS)**

MADRS is commonly used to evaluate the efficacy of antidepressants by assessing the severity of depression. It contains 10 items and the total score ranges from 0 to 60. The following cut-offs were proposed to classify the level of depression severity:

- 0-6: No depression (absence of symptoms)
- 7-19: Mild depression
- 20-34: Moderate depression
- 35-60: Severe depression

#### **Hamilton Rating Scale for Depression (HAM-D)**

HAM-D is a 17-item rating scale to determine the severity level of depression in a patient before, during, and after treatment. The total score ranges from 0 to 52 with the score corresponding to the following classifications:

- 0-7: No depression (normal)
- 8-16: Mild depression
- 17-23: Moderate depression
- Greater than or equal to 24: Severe depression

#### **Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)**

The PHQ-9 consists of 9 items that correspond to the DSM-5 criteria for unipolar major depression as well as an additional item assessing psychosocial impairment. Total scores range from 0 to 27 with the following suggested cutoff scores for level of depression severity:

- 0-4: No depression
- 5-9: Mild depression
- 10-14: Moderate depression
- 15-19: Moderately severe depression
- 20-27: Severe depression

#### **Clinically Useful Depression Outcome Scale (CUDOS)**

The CUDOS contains 18 items assessing all of the DSM-5 criteria for unipolar major depression, as well as psychosocial impairment and quality of life. Total symptom scores on the scale range from 0 to 64 with scores corresponding to the following depression classifications:

- 0-10: No depression
- 11-20: Minimal depression
- 21-30: Mild depression
- 31-45: Moderate depression
- 46-64: Severe depression

## **Background/Overview**

Spravato is a nasal spray formulation of esketamine, a non-competitive N-methyl D-aspartate (NMDA) receptor antagonist. It is indicated as monotherapy or in conjunction with an oral antidepressant for the treatment of treatment-resistant depression in adults and to treat depressive symptoms in adults with major depressive disorder with acute suicidal ideation or behavior in conjunction with an oral antidepressant. The mechanism by which it exerts its antidepressant effect is unknown, but it is known that esketamine causes an increased glutamate release which ultimately leads to increased release of various neurotrophic factors. Esketamine is the S-enantiomer of racemic ketamine, a drug that has been available for decades as an anesthetic agent. It has also been reported as a drug of abuse due to its dissociative and hallucinogenic effects. Spravato is a schedule III controlled substance and carries a boxed warning for sedation, dissociation, abuse and misuse, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

For treatment-resistant depression, the recommended dose of Spravato is 56 mg intranasally on Day 1, followed by 56 mg or 84 mg twice weekly for Weeks 1 to 4. For Weeks 5 to 8, Spravato should be administered once weekly at a dose of 56 mg or 84 mg. On Week 9 and thereafter, the dosing frequency should be individualized to the least frequent dosing to maintain remission/response (either once every 2 weeks or once weekly) at a dose of 56 mg or 84 mg. For acute suicidal ideation, the recommended dose is 84 mg twice per week for 4 weeks with a decrease to 56 mg twice per week permitted based on tolerability. After 4 weeks of treatment, evidence of therapeutic benefit should be evaluated to determine need for continued treatment. It should be noted that the use of Spravato beyond 4 weeks in patients with MDD with acute suicidal ideation has not been systematically evaluated. Because Spravato is only available in a device containing 28 mg of esketamine, the 56 mg dose requires two devices and the 84 mg dose requires 3 devices. Spravato must be administered under the direct supervision of a healthcare provider and the patient must be observed for at least 2 hours following administration. Patients should not engage in potentially hazardous activities, such as driving a motor vehicle or operating machinery, until the next day after a restful sleep. Due to the risks of serious adverse outcomes, Spravato is only available through a restricted distribution system via a Risk Evaluation and Mitigation Strategy (REMS).

Major depressive disorder is a serious, life-threatening condition with high rates of morbidity and a chronic disease course. It is considered the leading cause of disability worldwide and is also associated with increased mortality rates. About 30% to 40% of patients with major depressive disorder fail to respond to first-line treatments including oral antidepressant medications of all classes (see Table 1 for antidepressant classes with representative generic drugs). For regulatory purposes, the FDA considers patients to have treatment-resistant depression if they have major depressive disorder and they have not responded to treatment despite trials of at least two antidepressants given at adequate doses for an adequate duration in the current episode of depression. Treatment-resistant depression differs from an adjunctive treatment indication which applies to patients who have a partial, but insufficient, response to their current oral antidepressant and may benefit from add-on treatment. This patient population is typically less severely ill than the treatment-resistant depression population, and these patients are frequently on their first antidepressant. Also, adjunctive treatment trials have lower depression scale cutoff scores for study entry than treatment-resistant depression trials.

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### **Antidepressant Classes**

| <b>Class</b>                                         | <b>Representative generic drugs</b>                            |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)      | sertraline, fluoxetine, citalopram, escitalopram, paroxetine   |
| Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs) | venlafaxine, desvenlafaxine, duloxetine                        |
| Norepinephrine and Dopamine Reuptake Inhibitor       | bupropion                                                      |
| Serotonin and $\alpha_2$ adrenergic antagonist       | mirtazapine                                                    |
| Mixed Serotonergic Effects                           | nefazodone, trazodone, vilazodone                              |
| Monoamine oxidase inhibitors                         | phenelzine, selegiline, tranylcypromine                        |
| Tricyclic antidepressants (TCA)                      | amitriptyline, nortriptyline, desipramine, imipramine, doxepin |

Prior to the approval of Spravato, only one medication was FDA-approved for treatment-resistant depression, Symbyax®<sup>‡</sup>, which is a fixed-dose combination of olanzapine and fluoxetine. Intravenous ketamine, a schedule III controlled substance, is FDA-approved as an anesthetic agent and is not indicated for use in treatment-resistant depression. However, it has been studied for use in major depressive disorder and several other psychiatric indications and has been administered off-label for these uses. In addition, ketamine has been reported as a drug of abuse, due to its dissociative and hallucinogenic effects. Other off-label pharmacological interventions for treatment-resistant depression include augmentation with additional antidepressants, antipsychotics, lithium, thyroid hormone, buspirone, and other medications.

## **FDA or Other Governmental Regulatory Approval**

### **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)**

Spravato was approved in March 2019 for the treatment of adults with treatment-resistant depression in conjunction with an oral antidepressant. In July 2020, the approval was expanded to include adults with major depressive disorder with acute suicidal ideation or behavior. In January 2025, approval was expanded to include monotherapy for adults with treatment-resistant depression in adults.

## **Rationale/Source**

This medical policy was developed through consideration of peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community, U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval status, nationally accepted standards of medical practice and accepted standards of medical practice in this community, technology evaluation centers, reference to regulations, other plan medical policies, and accredited national guidelines.

### **Treatment Resistant Depression**

Spravato was approved for treatment resistant depression based on three clinical trials, a short-term trial (TRANSFORM-2), a long-term trial (SUSTAIN-1), and a monotherapy study (Study 3).

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TRANSFORM-2 was a 4-week, randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blind, multicenter study in adult patients 18 to less than 65 years old with treatment-resistant depression (n = 223). Included patients met Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)-5 criteria for major depressive disorder and in the current episode had not responded adequately to at least two different antidepressants of adequate dose and duration. After discontinuing prior antidepressant treatments, patients were randomized to receive twice weekly doses of intranasal Spravato or intranasal placebo. All patients also received open-label concomitant treatment with a newly initiated daily oral antidepressant (duloxetine, escitalopram, sertraline or extended-release venlafaxine as determined by the investigator based on patient's prior treatment history). Spravato could be titrated up to 84 mg starting with the second dose based on investigator discretion. The primary efficacy measure was change from baseline in the Montgomery-Asberg Depression Rating Scale (MADRS) total score at the end of the 4-week double-blind induction phase. The MADRS is a ten-item, clinician-rated scale used to assess severity of depressive symptoms. Scores on the MADRS range from 0 to 60 with higher scores indicating more severe depression. Spravato plus a newly initiated oral antidepressant demonstrated statistical superiority on the primary efficacy measure compared to placebo nasal spray plus a newly initiated oral antidepressant. The Spravato group had a least squares mean change from baseline in MADRS score of -19.8 vs a change of -15.8 in the placebo group. This corresponded to a least squares mean difference of -4.0 between the Spravato group and the placebo group (95% CI: -7.3, -0.6).

SUSTAIN-1 was a long-term randomized, double-blind, parallel-group, multicenter study in adults 18 to less than 65 years old who were known remitters and responders to Spravato (n = 705). Stable remission was defined as MADRS total score less than or equal to 12 for at least 3 of the last 4 weeks. Stable response was defined as MADRS total score reduction greater than or equal to 50% for the last 2 weeks of optimization and not in remission. After at least 16 initial weeks of treatment with Spravato and an oral antidepressant, stable remitters and stable responders were randomized separately to continue intranasal treatment with Spravato or switch to placebo nasal spray, in both cases with continuation of their oral antidepressant. The primary study endpoint was time to relapse in the stable remitter group. Relapse was defined as a MADRS total score of greater than or equal to 22 for 2 consecutive weeks or hospitalization for worsening depression or any other clinically relevant event indicative of relapse. Patients in stable remission who continued treatment with Spravato experienced a statistically significantly longer time to relapse of depressive symptoms than did patients on placebo with an estimated hazard ratio of 0.49 (95% CI: 0.29, 0.84). Time to relapse was also significantly delayed in the stable responder population. These patients experienced a statistically significantly longer time to relapse than patients on placebo with a hazard ratio of 0.3 (95% CI: 0.16, 0.55).

Study 3 was a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled, multicenter study in adult patients with treatment resistant depression to evaluate the efficacy, safety, and tolerability of Spravato 56 mg and 84 mg administered as monotherapy. Patients included in the study met DSM-5 criteria for MDD and in the current depressive episode, had not responded adequately to at least two different antidepressants of adequate dose and duration. After discontinuing prior antidepressant treatments if applicable, patients were randomized in a 1:1:2 ratio to receive twice weekly doses of intranasal Spravato 56 mg or 84 mg or intranasal placebo for four weeks.

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The primary efficacy measure of Study 3 was change from baseline in the MADRS total score at Day 28. Spravato 56 mg and 84 mg monotherapy demonstrated statistical superiority on the primary efficacy measure compared to placebo nasal spray. The least-squares mean difference from baseline at Day 28 in the Spravato 56 mg group was -11.4 (standard error 1.2), it was -13.0 (standard error 1.2) in the Spravato 84 mg group, and it was -6.3 (standard error 0.8) in the placebo group.

### **Depressive Symptoms in Patients with Major Depressive Disorder with Acute Suicidal Ideation or Behavior**

Spravato was approved in patients with acute suicidal ideation based on two identical Phase 3, short term, randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trials (ASPIRE I and ASPIRE II). Both trials included adults with moderate-to-severe major depressive disorder who had active suicidal ideation intent. Participants (n = 223 for ASPIRE I and 224 for ASPIRE II) were randomized 1:1 to receive Spravato 84 mg or placebo nasal spray twice weekly for 4 weeks. After the first dose, a one-time dose reduction to Spravato 56 mg was allowed for patients unable to tolerate the 84 mg dose. All patients received comprehensive standard of care treatment, including an initial inpatient psychiatric hospitalization and a newly initiated or optimized oral antidepressant. After completion of the 4-week treatment period, study follow-up continued through Day 90.

The primary endpoint was the change from baseline in the MADRS total score at 24 hours after the first dose. In both studies, Spravato demonstrated statistically superiority in meeting this endpoint. In ASPIRE I, the Spravato group had a least squares mean change from baseline of -15.9 and the placebo group had a change of -12. In ASPIRE II, the Spravato group had a least squares mean change from baseline of -16 and the placebo group had a change of -12.2.

## **References**

1. Spravato [package insert]. Janssen Pharmaceuticals Inc. Lakewood, NJ. Updated January 2025.
2. Spravato Drug Evaluation. Express Scripts. Updated March 2019.
3. Teter CJ, Kando JC, Wells BG. Major Depressive Disorder. In: Dippiro JT, Talbert RL, Yee GC, et al, (Eds). Pharmacotherapy—A Pathophysiologic Approach. 9<sup>th</sup> ed. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. 2014:1047-1066.
4. Using Scales to Monitor Symptoms and Treat Depression. UpToDate. Updated December 2020.

## **Policy History**

Original Effective Date: 07/18/2019

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07/03/2019 Medical Policy Committee review

07/18/2019 Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. New policy.

05/18/2020 Coding update

07/02/2020 Medical Policy Committee review

07/08/2020 Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.

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|            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 02/04/2021 | Medical Policy Committee review                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 02/10/2021 | Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Updated policy with criteria and background information relating to new indication for Spravato for acute suicidal ideation. Added continuation criteria for patients with treatment resistant depression. |
| 02/03/2022 | Medical Policy Committee review                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 02/09/2022 | Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 03/02/2023 | Medical Policy Committee review                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 03/08/2023 | Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Updated criteria to clarify that doses above the labeled maximum dose are not covered.                                                                                                                     |
| 03/07/2024 | Medical Policy Committee review                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 03/13/2024 | Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 03/06/2025 | Medical Policy Committee review                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 03/12/2025 | Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Updated criteria to reflect FDA approval for Spravato as monotherapy in treatment resistant depression.                                                                                                    |
| 03/05/2026 | Medical Policy Committee review                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 03/11/2026 | Medical Policy Implementation Committee approval. Coverage eligibility unchanged.                                                                                                                                                                            |

Next Scheduled Review Date: 03/2027

## **Coding**

*The five character codes included in the Louisiana Blue Medical Policy Coverage Guidelines are obtained from Current Procedural Terminology (CPT®)‡, copyright 2025 by the American Medical Association (AMA). CPT is developed by the AMA as a listing of descriptive terms and five character identifying codes and modifiers for reporting medical services and procedures performed by physician.*

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Codes used to identify services associated with this policy may include (but may not be limited to) the following:

| Code Type        | Code                                                           |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| CPT              | No codes                                                       |
| HCPCS            | G2082, G2083, J0013<br>Delete code effective 01/01/2026: S0013 |
| ICD-10 Diagnosis | All related diagnoses                                          |

\*Investigational – A medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is Investigational if the effectiveness has not been clearly tested and it has not been incorporated into standard medical practice. Any determination we make that a medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is Investigational will be based on a consideration of the following:

- A. Whether the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product can be lawfully marketed without approval of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and whether such approval has been granted at the time the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product is sought to be furnished; or
- B. Whether the medical treatment, procedure, drug, device, or biological product requires further studies or clinical trials to determine its maximum tolerated dose, toxicity, safety, effectiveness, or effectiveness as compared with the standard means of treatment or diagnosis, must improve health outcomes, according to the consensus of opinion among experts as shown by reliable evidence, including:
  1. Consultation with technology evaluation center(s);
  2. Credible scientific evidence published in peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community; or
  3. Reference to federal regulations.

\*\*Medically Necessary (or “Medical Necessity”) - Health care services, treatment, procedures, equipment, drugs, devices, items or supplies that a Provider, exercising prudent clinical judgment, would provide to a patient for the purpose of preventing, evaluating, diagnosing or treating an illness, injury, disease or its symptoms, and that are:

- A. In accordance with nationally accepted standards of medical practice;
- B. Clinically appropriate, in terms of type, frequency, extent, level of care, site and duration, and considered effective for the patient's illness, injury or disease; and
- C. Not primarily for the personal comfort or convenience of the patient, physician or other health care provider, and not more costly than an alternative service or sequence of services at least as likely to produce equivalent therapeutic or diagnostic results as to the diagnosis or treatment of that patient's illness, injury or disease.

For these purposes, “nationally accepted standards of medical practice” means standards that are based on credible scientific evidence published in peer-reviewed medical literature generally recognized by the relevant medical community, Physician Specialty Society recommendations and the views of Physicians practicing in relevant clinical areas and any other relevant factors.

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**NOTICE:** If the Patient's health insurance contract contains language that differs from the BCBSLA Medical Policy definition noted above, the definition in the health insurance contract will be relied upon for specific coverage determinations.

**NOTICE:** Medical Policies are scientific based opinions, provided solely for coverage and informational purposes. Medical Policies should not be construed to suggest that the Company recommends, advocates, requires, encourages, or discourages any particular treatment, procedure, or service, or any particular course of treatment, procedure, or service.

**NOTICE:** Federal and State law, as well as contract language, including definitions and specific contract provisions/exclusions, take precedence over Medical Policy and must be considered first in determining eligibility for coverage.

**NOTICE:** If an authorization for an ongoing course of treatment has been provided to a member and the member changes from one health plan to another health plan (e.g., a member moves from carrier A to Louisiana Blue), Louisiana Blue may honor the previous health plan's authorization for the same service under the same type of in-network benefit for a 90-day transition period. Documentation of the authorization for the ongoing course of treatment from the previous health plan must be provided to us by the member or their provider and the services provided for the course of treatment must otherwise be a covered service under the Louisiana Blue health plan. This provision does not apply to medications covered under the plan's pharmacy benefit.