

Vagus Nerve Stimulators (State Products)

Policy Number: **M20260406020**

Effective Date: **5/1/2026**

Sponsoring Department: **Health Care Services**

Impacted Department(s): **Health Care Services**

Type of Policy: ☒ Internal ☒ External

Data Classification: ☐ Confidential ☐ Restricted ☒ Public

Applies to (Line of Business):

- ☐ Corporate (All)
- ✦ State Products, if yes which plan(s): ☒ MediSource; ☒ MediSource Connect; ☒ Child Health Plus; ☒ Essential Plan
- ✦ Medicare, if yes, which plan(s): ☐ MAPD; ☐ PDP; ☐ ISNP; ☐ CSNP
- ✦ Commercial, if yes, which type: ☐ Large Group; ☐ Small Group; ☐ Individual
- ☐ Self-Funded Services (*Refer to specific Summary Plan Descriptions (SPDs) to determine any pre-authorization or pre-certification requirements and coverage limitations. In the event of any conflict between this policy and the SPD of a Self-Funded Plan, the SPD shall supersede the policy.*)

Excluded Products within the Selected Lines of Business (LOB)

N/A

Applicable to Vendors? Yes ☐ No ☒

Purpose and Applicability:

To set forth the medical necessity criteria for **Vagus Nerve Stimulators (VNS)** for State products.

Policy:

Background:

The vagus nerve, or cranial nerve X, is the longest of the cranial nerves. It conveys both motor and sensory information and represents a principal pathway of the parasympathetic nervous system. It is composed of motor, sensory, and parasympathetic nerve fibers and extends from the brainstem through the neck into the chest and abdomen, innervating various organs thereby modulating key physiological processes including cardiac rhythm, arterial pressure, gastrointestinal motility, gastric acid production, as well as the function of the gallbladder and biliary system. Vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) is a neuromodulatory intervention in which an implanted pulse generator delivers electrical impulses to the cervical branch of the vagus nerve. The therapy involves the surgical placement of a subcutaneous pulse generator in the pectoral region, which is connected via lead wires to an electrode in the left vagus

nerve. VNS modulates concentrations of neurotransmitters across multiple regions of the brain, with the therapeutic objective of reducing the severity and/or duration of symptoms associated with neurological and psychiatric disorders, including but not limited to epilepsy and treatment-resistant major depressive disorder.

Commercial and Self-Funded: For vagus nerve stimulators, MCG guidelines are utilized for medical necessity clinical coverage criteria.

Medicare Advantage: There currently is a National Coverage Determination (NCD) for vagus nerve stimulators. Please refer to the links listed in the reference section for Medicare Advantage members.

MediSource, MediSource Connect, Child Health Plus & Essential Plan: Vagus nerve stimulators are covered utilizing the criteria below.

Clinical Indications

Vagus Nerve Stimulators are considered medically necessary and covered for MediSource, MediSource Connect, Child Health Plus and Essential Plan when **1 or more** of the following criteria are met:

- The device is utilized as an adjunctive therapy in reducing the frequency of seizures in patients four years of age and older with partial onset seizures that are refractory to antiepileptic medications
- The device is utilized for treatment-resistant depression in adults that have not shown improvement after trying four or more medicines and/or electroconvulsive therapy (ECT)
- The device is utilized for stroke therapy in conjunction with rehabilitation to recover function in hands and arms after an ischemic stroke

Pre-Authorization Required? Yes ☒ No ☐

Definitions

Vagus Nerve Stimulator (VNS) is an implantable device positioned subcutaneously in the patient's chest that administers intermittent electrical impulses through leads affixed to the left cervical vagus nerve. The amplitude, pulse width, and frequency of stimulation can be individually programmed to meet patient-specific therapeutic needs, and patients may activate or modulate the device as necessary using an external wearable magnet.

Partial onset seizures are sudden, uncontrolled surges of electrical activity beginning in one specific area of the brain, causing various symptoms; from unusual feelings and sensations to muscle contractions and a loss or change in consciousness.

Treatment resistant depression is defined as depression that does not respond to multiple attempts at treatment of adequate duration with appropriate doses of antidepressants.

Ischemic Stroke is a variety of conditions in which blood flow to part(s) of the brain is decreased, resulting in damage to brain tissues. This reduction of blood flow can be due to decreased systemic perfusion, severe stenosis, or blood vessel occlusion.

References

Related Policies, Processes and Other Documents

N/A

Non-Regulatory References

Andalib S, Divani AA, Ayata C, Baig S, Arsava EM, Topcuoglu MA, Cáceres EL, Parikh V, Desai MJ, Majid A, Girolami S, Di Napoli M. Vagus Nerve Stimulation in Ischemic Stroke. Curr Neurol Neurosci Rep. 2023 Dec;23(12):947-962. doi: 10.1007/s11910-023-01323-w. Epub 2023 Nov 27

Majid A, Kassab M. Pathophysiology of ischemic stroke. In: UpToDate, Post TW (Ed), UpToDate, Waltham, MA. (Accessed on March 17, 2026)

Symplr, Inc. Health Technology Assessment. Vagus Nerve Stimulation for Epilepsy, Houston, TX: June 2014

Symplr, Inc. Health Technology Assessment. Vagus Nerve Stimulation for Epilepsy in Pediatric Patients, Houston, TX: January 2021

Symplr, Inc. Health Technology Assessment. Vagus Nerve Stimulation for Treatment-Resistant Depression, Houston, TX: February 2019

Regulatory References

Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) [web site]. National Coverage Determination (NCD): Vagus Nerve Stimulation (160.18). Available at: <https://www.cms.gov/medicare-coverage-database/view/ncd.aspx?ncdid=230&ncdver=3&keyword=vagus&keywordType=starts&areald=s65&docType=NCA,CAL,NC,MEDECAC,TA,MCD,6,3,5,1,F,P&contractOption=all&sortBy=relevance&bc=1>
Accessed March 16, 2026.

New York State Department of Health Medicaid Update May 2023 Vol.39, No.10. Medicaid Coverage for Vagus Nerve Stimulators. Available at: https://www.health.ny.gov/health_care/medicaid/program/update/2023/no10_2023-05.htm#VNS Accessed March 13, 2026.

Version Control

Signature / Approval on File? Yes ☒ No ☐

Revision Date	Policy Author / Owner	Notes
5/1/2026	Health Care Services	New