



September 16, 2024

Washington Prescription Drug Affordability Board  
Washington Health Care Authority  
PO Box 42716  
Olympia, Washington 98504-2716

## **Public Comments on Cost Reviews and Upper Payment Limits**

Dear Members and Staff of the Washington Prescription Drug Affordability Board:

The Ensuring Access through Collaborative Health (EACH) Coalition is a network of national and state patient organizations and allied groups that advocate for treatment affordability policies that consider patient needs first. We also have a second half of our coalition, called the Patient Inclusion Council (PIC), uniquely consisting of patient and caregiver members. EACH and PIC both work together and independently to ensure the patient voice is included.

We look forward to engaging with the board to improve the cost-review process to ensure it ultimately benefits the patients who rely on the drugs under review. We respectfully urge the board to consider the concerns of patient organizations outlined in this letter. We offer our coalition as a resource to board members seeking to connect with patient organizations and patients.

### **Cost Reviews and UPLs Could Compromise Patient Access to Medications**

While we applaud the board's commitment to supporting patients and lowering the costs of prescription medications, we are concerned that cost reviews and upper payment limits (UPLs) can further complicate an already complex healthcare marketplace and result in worse outcomes for patients.

At their core, cost reviews necessitate selecting individual drugs for review and implementing market interventions for the selected drugs. This alone puts PDABs in a position of picking winners and losers between drugs and within the broader population of Washington patients. Individual drug reviews unnecessarily create inequities between patient populations.

While UPLs are intended to lower costs for patients, the reality is that they will create a new incentive structure for payers that could compromise patient access to the selected medications due to increased utilization management or reshuffling of formularies. This eventuality was outlined by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services in their [May 3, 2024 Guidance on Medicare Drug Price Negotiation](#), "CMS is concerned that Part D sponsors may be incentivized in certain circumstances to disadvantage selected drugs by placing selected drugs on less favorable tiers compared to non-selected drugs, or by applying utilization management that is not based on medical appropriateness to steer Part D beneficiaries away from selected drugs in favor of non-selected drugs."

Additionally, many of the drugs under cost review are administered directly by physicians under a "buy and bill" model. Physician reimbursement rates are already being squeezed, and UPLs could additionally lower opportunities for treatment costs to be recouped. As a result, it is likely that physicians would adjust treatment recommendations to avoid facing financial deficits, leaving patients with fewer treatment options.



## **ENSURING ACCESS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE HEALTH**

Finally, creating a unique pricing structure in Washington will create state-specific conditions for coverage. We don't know yet how either insurers or manufacturers will react to state-by-state exceptions, but this has potential to cause either of these stakeholders to limit availability in the state and could cause confusion for patients and providers in the state.

### **Upper Payment Limits Don't Necessarily Translate to Patient Savings**

Assuming that UPLs will directly translate to lowered costs for patients ignores the complicated nature of our healthcare system. In our system, patients are not responsible for paying the full cost of their prescription medications nor are they allowed to freely select from the full range of treatments medically approved for their condition. Instead, these decisions are determined by their insurance company and pharmacy benefit manager (PBM). It is also these stakeholders that determine if cost-savings realized by the payer are subsequently shared with patients. Unfortunately, in most cases, they are not.

Payers in our health marketplace do not necessarily derive the most value from the lowest cost drugs. According to [reporting on PBMs by the New York Times](#), "Even when an inexpensive generic version of a drug is available, PBMs sometimes have a financial reason to push patients to take a brand-name product that will cost them much more. For example, Express Scripts typically urges employers to cover brand-name versions of several hepatitis C drugs and not the cheaper generic versions. The higher the original sticker price, the larger the discounts the PBMs can finagle, the fatter their profits — even if the ultimate discounted price of the brand-name drug remains higher than the cost of the generic."

Ultimately, this could mean insurers and PBMs place drugs subject to UPLs on higher tiers of the formulary. This could lead to higher out-of-pocket costs for patients who could face higher copay or coinsurance rates to retain access to that drug or alternatively be forced to switch to a more expensive drug that results in higher profits to their PBM.

These plan-prompted changes are collectively known as non-medical switching and were also noted in the excerpt from CMS above. Non-medical switches in medication can also cause unnecessary complications for patients. At a minimum, a switch in medication will require more doctor visits to monitor the efficacy of a new medication. Further, if the switch results in side effects or worsened outcomes, patients could face medical interventions or hospitalization and the additional costs borne out by both.

### **Patient Access Cannot Be Compromised**

Chronic conditions are incredibly complex to treat. Each patient faces a unique experience and should be able to work with their doctor to identify the treatment that works best for them. Substituting or requiring patients to change drugs based on cost considerations instead of medical needs can disrupt continuity of care and result in complications and higher overall medical costs.

We urge this board to seriously consider the unique circumstances faced by these patients and work diligently to ensure that access to all treatments is protected. We strongly urge the board and staff to utilize the authority of the board to fully explore with all healthcare stakeholders how UPLs will be implemented and identify in advance any adverse impact to patients.



## **ENSURING ACCESS THROUGH COLLABORATIVE HEALTH**

### **Identify and Resolve Patient-Reported Obstacles to Care**

As we have outlined, while well-intentioned, UPLs fail to address many of the underlying causes and complicated factors that result in higher prescription drug costs for patients. Therefore, we urge the board to focus its time on identifying and addressing patient-reported obstacles to drug affordability.

Failing to resolve the underlying factors that lead to higher costs for patients can result in short-term relief and uneven benefits – aiding some but potentially leaving others with higher costs and drug accessibility challenges. Additionally, regulators should clearly define cost-saving targets, including what percentage will be patients and what will be the state or the broader healthcare system.

Ultimately, we know that defining affordability is a key aspect of the drug review process that the Washington board is seeking to improve. We implore the board, to the extent that it is able to within statute, focus on defining affordability based on patient reported costs and concerns.

### **Sound Health Policy is Founded on Patient Perspectives**

In continuation of that point, while our health system and the policies that impact it are complicated, one principle is simple: every change that we make and policy we implement should ultimately benefit patients. We urge the board to keep this principle as a singular focus as it evaluates the impact of its cost reviews and UPLs.

We urge the board to utilize this organization and its members as a direct conduit to understanding and incorporating patient and caregiver perspectives, as well as those of patient organizations who have an understanding of the life cycle of disease from the lens of prevention, diagnosis, and disease management.

We appreciate your laudable efforts to improve our health system and your steadfast commitment to protecting patients. We look forward to working together to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,



Tiffany Westrich-Robertson  
Ensuring Access through Collaborative Health (EACH) Coalition