Exhibit 6A-

Written Comments

(60-day COMAR 14.01.04.05C(2))

Maryland

Comments PDAB -PDAB- <comments.pdab@maryland.gov>

Board Selected Drugs: Jardiance, Ozempic, Trulicity and Farxiga

1 message

Patrick Mutch <pmutch@chasebrexton.org> Fri, Jul 19, 2024 at 6:37 PM
To: "comments.pdab@maryland.gov" <comments.pdab@maryland.gov>
Cc: [redacted]

Dear Members of PDAB,

As President and Chief Executive Officer of Chase Brexton Health Care, I am expressing our concerns focused on the several of latest diabetes medications under review, Jardiance, Ozempic, Trulicity and Farxiga. We rely on these medications to manage the complex healthcare needs of the over 4,700 diabetic patients, most of whom are underserved patients from marginalized communities.

Chase Brexton Health Care is a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) non-profit organization with five centers in Baltimore City, Columbia, Glen Burnie, Woodlawn (Security Square) and Easton. We serve more than 45,000 unique patients annually, most of whom are underserved and would not have any other access to health care. Of the 45,000+ patients, 45% are insured by Medicaid, and 26% are uninsured.. As a safety net provider, Chase Brexton relies on the 340b margins from these diabetic medications to provide comprehensive outpatient services to care for our patients and sustain our mission.. Our chief medical officer, Dr. Sebastian Ruhs has submitted a separate letter to comment on the clinical benefits of these medications and potential negative effects if an upper payment limit negatively impacts the ability of patients to receive these medications.

Once again, we would like to bring to your attention that Federally Qualified Health Centers such as Chase Brexton Health Care have a dedicated mission to serve impoverished communities “regardless of ability to pay”. Chase Brexton Health Care and other FQHCs utilize their 340B savings to provide the array of integrated care that includes, but not limited to, adult and pediatric primary care, behavioral health, substance use, psychiatry, ob/gyn services, dental services, pharmacy, social services, LQBTQ affirming care, food assistance, transportation, and housing. The 340B savings are essential to safety-net providers in reducing health care disparities, increasing access to comprehensive services, and ensuring patients have access to life saving medications. Indeed, FQHCs are some of the best stewards of the program and any reduction in the 340B savings reduces those entities’ ability to serve the most marginalized of Marylanders. **We respectfully ask the Board to review the potentially negative impacts to 340B covered entities before implementing any actions. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.**

Patrick F. Mutch

Patrick F. Mutch
President & Chief Executive Officer

Pronouns (he/him)

Chase Brexton Health Care
Because everyone’s health matters.

Chase Brexton Health Care

1111 North Charles Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • 410.837.2050 • chasebrexton.org

July 19, 2024

Submitted for Public Comment: Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board

Dear Members of the Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board,

As Chief Medical Officer, I write on behalf of the medical and pharmaceutical team at Chase Brexton Health Care which foresees a potentially significant negative impact on the health outcomes of Diabetes Mellitus (DM) patients should an upper payment limit on vital, preferred medications, such as Ozempic, Trulicity, Farxiga, and Jardiance, be established and restrict these medications from use. Cost increases may be seen should providers have to switch patients to non-preferred drug options. I will not address the other issue which is the significant 340b margins from these medications which are totally reinvested in caring for the vast majority of our patients who have complex healthcare needs and are underserved and often uninsured.

I can attest to both the importance and complexity of treating this chronic disease which has been diagnosed in nearly 500,000 (1 in 10) Marylanders and remains undiagnosed in an estimated 140,000 Marylanders. This number of patients and potential patients in need of effective and accessible treatment options should lead the Prescription Drug Affordability Board (PDAB) to reduce restrictions to ensure positive and cost-effective health outcomes for every community member in our state.

Patient outcomes and cost effective, accessible treatment for this complex disease is a priority. As providers and pharmacists, we must consider many factors in creating our treatment plan including adherence, identified comorbid conditions, and risks of developing comorbid conditions.

Treatment of DM is a complex matter and when prescribing medications, many factors must be considered:

> **1) Adherence**: Complex regimens, such as insulin injections multiple times a day, are less likely to be taken as prescribed than simple regimens. Trulicity and Ozempic, which are once weekly injections, have shown to greatly improve adherence, which leads to better controlled sugar levels. **Optimized blood glucose control decreases the risk of developing costly complications from DM, such as renal failure, heart attacks, and strokes.**
>
> **2) Comorbid conditions:** People with DM are more likely to have other comorbid conditions, such obesity, hypertension, kidney disease, and cardiovascular disease. Some of those conditions are strongly associated with DM and a result of poorly treated or untreated DM. Some medications treating DM can

Chase Brexton Health Care

1111 North Charles Street • Baltimore, MD 21201 • 410.837.2050 • chasebrexton.org

improve clinical outcomes in patients with existing renal or cardiovascular disease. Farxiga and Jardiance belong to the class of sodium-glucose co-transporter-2 (SGLT2) inhibitors. SGLT2 inhibitors have shown to improve clinical outcome in patients with preexisting congestive heart failure and preexisting renal disease. **SGLT2s, like Farxiga and Jardiance, can improve overall mortality and decrease hospital admissions in patients with those conditions.** Not having the option to choose from such DM regimens can lead to further exacerbation of such preexisting conditions, such as renal failure leading to dialysis and congestive heart failure with increases in hospital admissions and worsening overall mortality.

3) Risk of developing new cardiovascular disease in patients at risk: Some DM drugs decrease the risk for developing new cardiovascular disease, such as heart attacks and strokes. Ozempic and Trulicity belong to the class of glucagon-like-peptide-1 (GLP-1) agonists. In addition to improving blood glucose levels, those GLP-1s promote weight loss, which is an important factor in treatment of DM, and they decrease the risk of heart attacks and strokes in at risk patients. **Being able to choose from Ozempic and Trulicity to treat DM minimizes the risk of developing cardiovascular complications which can lead to poor clinical outcomes and increase in cost.**

To treat DM, we need to be able to choose from options that improve adherence, and which can be tailored to the individual needs of the patient, depending on their pre-existing comorbid conditions, or their risk of developing such. **Limiting access to Farxiga, Jardiance, Ozempic, and Trulicity and aswitching patients to non-preferred, less effective medications, will put multitudes of patients at risk of reduced adherence, poor control of blood sugar level, and increases in complications from comorbid conditions all of** which then further increases the risk of developing complications from DM. These factors will ultimately lead to an increase in new drugs prescribed and an increase in hospital admissions, and therefore an increase in overall cost.

Sincerely,

Sebastian Ruhs, MD, PhD
Infectious Disease Physician
Chief Medical Officer

CC: Patrick Mutch, CEO, Chase Brexton Health Care
Mahro Ershadi, Chief Pharmacy and Strategy Officer, Chase Brexton Health Care
Jeff Cywinski, Director of Pharmacy, Chase Brexton Health Care

July 22, 2024

Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board
16900 Science Drive Suite 112-114
Bowie, MD 20715

VIA EMAIL TO: comments.pdab@maryland.gov

RE: Board Selected Drugs – Ozempic®

Dear Members of the Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board:

Novo Nordisk appreciates the opportunity to submit written comments to the Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board (Board) regarding the Board's cost review of Ozempic®. Novo Nordisk is a global healthcare company committed to improving the lives of those living with serious chronic conditions, including diabetes, hemophilia, growth disorders, and obesity. The Novo Nordisk Foundation, our majority shareholder, is among the top five largest charitable foundations in the world. Accordingly, our company's mission and actions reflect the Foundation's vision to contribute significantly to research and development that improves the lives of people and the sustainability of society.

As we have expressed in our previous comments to the Board, we share the Board's interest in making prescription medications affordable to patients. **We believe, however, that any efforts by the Board to pursue an upper payment limit (UPL) are misguided and will ultimately harm Marylanders' ability to access prescribed medications and disrupt their clinical care.** For these reasons, we are providing the following information to not only reaffirm the cost-effectiveness of Ozempic®, but to also urge the Board to reconsider its decision to subject Ozempic® to a cost review.

Diabetes is a devastating disease.

Type 2 diabetes is a chronic disease that places an enormous strain on patients suffering from it; families across America; the entire U.S. healthcare system, including the Maryland healthcare system; and the economy as a whole. To fully understand the impact that GLP-1 medications like Ozempic® can have, it is important to understand the toll that metabolic chronic disease has on society. The CDC estimates that 36 million Americans are living with type 2 diabetes today, and an additional 98 million Americans are prediabetic and at risk for developing the disease.[1]

[1] *National Diabetes Statistics Report: Estimates of Diabetes and Its Burden in the United States*, CDC (accessed May 22, 2024), https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/php/data-research/index.html; *Statistics About Diabetes*, Am. Diabetes Ass'n (accessed May 22, 2024), https://diabetes.org/about-diabetes/statistics/about-diabetes.

In Maryland 537,000 adults (11.1% of the adult population) are living with diagnosed diabetes. [2] These numbers are only projected to increase, and by 2045 it is expected that 783 million adults will be living with type 2 diabetes,[3] with one third of that population experiencing cardiovascular disease, and two fifths facing chronic kidney diseases.[4] [5] Patients living with type 2 diabetes often face a significant disease burden that impacts their quality of life and overall health. This chronic condition is a progressive and insidious disease that worsens over time and requires continuous management. [6] Many patients living with diabetes suffer from debilitating symptoms that include exhaustion, depression, and damage to their eyes, nerves, kidneys, and limbs. [7] Without proper and stable treatment, these symptoms can quickly advance to even more serious complications.

Diabetes is a costly chronic condition.

The state of Maryland allocates significant resources to managing diabetes, including substantial healthcare expenditures for treatment, hospitalization, and management of complications associated with the disease. These costs are driven by the high prevalence of the disease. However, Ozempic® and other GLP-1 therapies pioneered by Novo Nordisk have the potential to transform patients' lives and to drive hundreds of billions of dollars in long-term savings for the state. [8] [9] By effectively managing blood sugar levels, Ozempic® helps reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes complications such as cardiovascular disease, kidney damage, and neuropathy. Studies showed that patients with HbA1c below the ADA target for glycemic control (HbA1c<7%) incur substantially lower diabetes-related annual costs compared to patients with insufficient glycemic control.[10] In addition to reducing direct medical costs, lower HbA1c is also associated with statistically significant lower diabetes-related outpatient costs, acute care costs, and drug costs. Fewer complications mean fewer hospital visits, medical procedures, and long-term care needs. Any drug therapy able to reduce the prevalence of these expensive and deadly diseases will provide enormous personal, economic, and societal value to individuals, families, and communities across the country, including those in Maryland.

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[2] The American Diabetes Association. The Disease Burden of Diabetes in Maryland. adv_2024_state_fact_maryland.pdf (diabetes.org)
[3] International Diabetes Federation. IDF Diabetes Atlas. 10th edn. 2021. https://www.diabetesatlas.org/ (accessed December 2023); IDF 2021 report;
[4] *Murphy D et al. Ann Intern Med 2016; 165(7):473-481*
[5] *Saran R et al. Am J Kidney Dis 2019; S0272-6386(19)31008-X*
[6] Vivian A. Fonseca, Defining and Characterizing the Progression of Type 2 Diabetes, Diabetes Care (Nov. 2009), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2811457/.
[7] *E.g.*, Divya Gopisetty et al.*, How Does Diabetes Affect Daily Life? A Beyond-A1C Perspective on Unmet Needs*, Clinical Diabetes (April 1, 2018), https://diabetesjournals.org/clinical/article/36/2/133/32827/How-Does-Diabetes-Affect-Daily-Life-A-Beyond-A1C; Christopher J. Bulpitt et al., *Association of Symptoms of Type 2 Diabetic Patients With Severity of Disease, Obesity, and Blood Pressure*, Diabetes Care (Jan. 1, 1998), https://diabetesjournals.org/care/article/21/1/111/19852/Association-of-Symptoms-of-Type-2-Diabetic; Matt Reynolds, *What the Scientists Who Pioneered Weight-Loss Drugs Want You to Know*, Wired (June 12, 2023), https://www.wired.com/story/obesity-drugs-researcher-interview-ozempic-wegovy/.
[8] Financial Times Editorial Board, *The promise of anti-obesity drugs*, Financial Times (Sept. 6, 2023), https://www.ft.com/content/a6e0ccbd-66b4-4e5d-9a9a-002b95b0d19f.
[9] Gina Kolata, We Know Where New Weight Loss Drugs Come From, But Not Why They Work, N.Y. Times (Aug. 17, 2023), https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/17/health/weight-loss-drugs-obesity-ozempic-wegovy.html.
[10] Boye KS, Lage MJ, Thieu VT. The Association Between HbA1c and 1-Year Diabetes-Related Medical Costs: A Retrospective Claims Database Analysis. Diabetes Ther. 2022;13(2):367-377. doi:10.1007/s13300-022-01212-4

Novo Nordisk is committed to curing diabetes.

We are the largest private investor in diabetes research and development in the world**.** We are not only further investing in innovation to enhance diabetes treatment but are also striving to cure it. GLP-1-based therapies represent a significant advance in the treatment of type 2 diabetes, and Ozempic® reduces the risk of all-cause mortality, major adverse cardiovascular events, and stroke among people with type 2 diabetes. The development of semaglutide, the active ingredient in Ozempic®, spanned over a decade. This long and rigorous process reflects the complexity and precision required to bring a new therapeutic molecule from concept to market. The work of the scientists, researchers, and personnel not only made Novo Nordisk the industry leader in treating diabetes, but it also radically altered the medical management of this complicated and devastating chronic disease and opened the door to new possibilities and avenues of inquiry for other serious chronic diseases—including heart, kidney, liver, and Alzheimer's diseases.

Ozempic® was approved by the Food and Drug Administration ("FDA") in 2017 for the treatment of type 2 diabetes. It increases the body's production of insulin, a hormone that lowers blood sugar levels, and reduces production of glucagon, which increases blood sugar levels. As the New York Times recently reported, Ozempic® is "changing diabetes treatment," as many patients "have been able to lower their insulin doses after starting Ozempic [®], and some have been able to go off insulin entirely." [11] Ozempic® is a once weekly GLP-1 receptor agonist indicated as an adjunct to diet and exercise to improve glycemic control in adults with type 2 diabetes and to reduce the risk of major adverse cardiovascular events (MACE) (Cardiovascular death, non-fatal myocardial infarction (MI) or non-fatal stroke) in adults with type 2 diabetes and established cardiovascular disease.[12] Research and clinical trials demonstrate the superiority of GLP-1 receptor agonist to other antihyperglycemic drugs in improving glycemic efficacy, reducing weight and blood pressure, and having a cardioprotective effect, all without the risk of hypoglycemia.[13] These drugs have transformed the guidelines for the management of patients with diabetes.[14] All told, Ozempic has revolutionized the management of diabetes and related comorbidities – providing unsurpassed value to the healthcare system.

Novo Nordisk works to make our medicines accessible.

Novo Nordisk devotes significant resources, like rebates to insurers and pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) for formulary placement, to make its medicines accessible and we will continue to collaborate with policymakers to expand access for patients. However, gaps will remain as long as the U.S. healthcare system allows intermediaries, such as PBMs, to stand between innovators and patients. The complexities of the system unfortunately reduce access and affordability for many Americans. At Novo Nordisk, we are driven by our commitment to

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[11] Dani Blum, How Ozempic Is Changing Diabetes Treatment, N.Y. Times (May 13, 2024), https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/13/well/live/insulin-ozempic-diabetes.html; see also Paresh Dandona, Ajay Chaudhuri, and Husam Ghanim, Semaglutide in Early Type 1 Diabetes, N. Engl. J. Med. (2023) https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2302677.
[12] Ozempic® Prescribing Information. Plainsboro, NJ: Novo Nordisk Inc. https://www.novo-pi.com/ozempic.pdf
[13] Latif W, Lambrinos KJ, Rodriguez R. Compare and Contrast the Glucagon-Like Peptide-1 Receptor Agonists (GLP1RAs) [Updated 2023 Mar 27]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2024 Jan-. Available from: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK572151/
[14] American Diabetes Association. Standards of care in diabetes—2024. Diabetes Care. 2024;47(suppl 1):S1- S321.

improving the lives of those living with serious chronic conditions—a commitment we demonstrate through our efforts to promote access and affordability.

Notably, the price of Ozempic® has substantially declined every year since launch. Since Ozempic® was first introduced in 2018, the net price—the amount that is actually paid to Novo Nordisk for the medicine—has declined by roughly 40 percent in the U.S. The decrease in net price has been driven largely by the market dynamics that are common in highly competitive product classes, where health plans negotiate substantial price concessions from manufacturers in exchange for preferred formulary access. As more GLP-1 receptors enter the market, increased competition will continue to place downward pressure on net prices. Today, 80 percent of U.S. patients—and 82.5% percent of Maryland patients, specifically—with insurance coverage for Ozempic® are paying $25 or less for each prescription, and 90 percent —are paying $50 or less. Additionally, 99.6% of Medicaid patients pay less than $5 on average for Ozempic®.[15] Short-sighted price-setting policies advanced by state governments are likely to disrupt these competitive dynamics by discouraging additional manufacturers, including generic manufacturers, from entering the market.

For patients who continue to struggle to afford their medication, either due to inadequate plan benefit design or a lack of coverage altogether, Novo Nordisk provides additional financial support through our affordability programs. We also provide copay assistance for Ozempic® that reduces a commercially insured patient's out-of-pocket cost to as little as $25. As evidenced by our efforts, Novo Nordisk remains committed to ensuring access to our medications by reducing the out-of-pocket cost burden, helping to transform the complex pricing system, and fostering better pricing predictability.

The methodology used by the Board to select Ozempic® for a cost review is misguided.

The information underpinning the Board's decision to proceed with a cost review on Ozempic® is based on limited data that does not reflect the actual price that health care systems, plans, and PBMs pay. As noted previously, 80 percent of U.S. patients—and 82.5% percent of Maryland patients, specifically—with insurance coverage for Ozempic® are paying $25 or less for each prescription, and 90 percent— are paying $50 or less. While the process of conducting a cost review includes gathering additional information regarding a drug and its price, the Board's process so far has been opaque and uneven. For instance, it remains unclear how the Board assessed all drugs eligible for a cost review and ultimately selected the six drugs subject to review. Additionally, there is no clear process for manufacturers to dispute or correct inaccurate information received by the Board before it proceeds to vote on whether use of a drug "has led or will lead to affordability challenges for the State health care system or high out-of-pocket costs for patients"; without transparency around the data the Board is using to assess Ozempic®, Novo Nordisk is unable to verify the accuracy of the information. Given current market dynamics, the risk of inaccuracy could have dire consequences for patient access. The PDAB's process of conducting cost reviews and potentially seeking to implement a UPL must be

[15] Novo Nordisk internal data on file.

fair, reasoned, and transparent. It must allow for meaningful engagement with manufacturers and other stakeholders.

A UPL would put Ozempic's® current access and affordability for the majority of Marylanders at risk.

Healthcare in America is complex - varying insurance plans with different formularies and coverage policies create inconsistencies in access and affordability for patients. To ensure that our patients can access our medications, we offer substantial price concessions to ensure patients can reasonably afford their medication. Novo Nordisk has worked to ensure Ozempic® is covered by 99% of commercial insurance plans in the United States.

An UPL could undermine this affordability picture, and potentially *raise* out-of-pocket costs for patients, as plans may prefer other medications not subject to an UPL that can continue to offer larger rebates to insurers and PBMs. As we have stated in our previous comments, research has consistently shown that plans tend to prefer highly rebated products over lower priced alternatives, given the impact of rebates on keeping plan liability and premium pressure low. A recent Government Accountability Office report highlighted that "Part D plan sponsors frequently gave preferred formulary placement to highly rebated, relatively higher-gross-cost brand-name drugs compared to lower-gross-cost competitor drugs, which generally had lower rebates."[16] Setting a UPL for drugs sold in the state of Maryland, could result in decreased access to those drugs as the dynamics in the current system favor drugs that have higher rebates. The impact of a UPL would undermine the PDABs goal of lowering costs and promoting affordable access for state and local governments and Medicaid.

A UPL that is too low could lead payors to disadvantage UPL-subjected drugs in favor of competitors with higher list prices/higher rebates. While the Board is looking at a select few medications used to treat diabetes, it is not looking at the drug class in totality. As the Board seeks to apply UPLs to select drugs, it is effectively putting its thumb on the scale and picking winners and losers within a crowded and highly competitive drug class. Recent history demonstrates that this not a purely theoretical concern. In 2020, the drugmaker Viatris launched the biosimilar Semglee® at a substantially lower wholesale acquisition cost (WAC) than its reference product, Lantus®. After realizing very modest formulary uptake, Viatris launched a higher priced version of Semglee®, with the flexibility to offer manufacturer rebates to plans and PBMs. The relaunch of Semglee® at a higher WAC resulted in greater formulary access and increased market volume.[17] Novo Nordisk observed similar trends with our own unbranded

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[16] Government Accountability Office. CMS Should Monitor Effects of Rebates on Drug Coverage and Spending: Statement of John E.
Dicken, Director, Health Care Before the Subcommittee on Health, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives [Internet]. 2023 Sep 19 [cited 2024 Jun 30]. Available from: https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-107056.pdf

[17] Fein AJ. How Health Plans Profit—and Patients Lose—From Highly Rebated Brand-Name Drugs [Internet]. Philadelphia, PA: Drug
Channels Institute; 2019 Feb 20 [cited 2024 Jun 30]. Available from : https://www.drugchannels.net/2019/02/how-health-plansprofitand-patients.html

biologic for NovoLog®, which launched at a 50 percent reduction from the branded list price to address policymaker interest in lower list prices and to provide an additional option to lower out of pocket costs for some patients. Plan uptake of the unbranded version was tepid. In 2023, formulary access of the insulin aspart unbranded biologic stood at 4 percent, while it was 58 percent for branded NovoLog®.[18]

The prescription drug supply chain continues to be driven by misaligned incentives – where PBMs' horizontal and vertical integration has created and compounded financial conflicts of interest and incentives for their business practices that threaten to "lessen competition, disadvantage rivals, and inflate drug costs—all to the detriment of patients." [19] As a result of this consolidation, the largest PBMs in the U.S. exert significant control over the treatment options available to patients.[20] Through formulary designs, PBMs apply influence by directing patients to medications that can generate the highest rebates from manufacturers.[21] Loss of coverage can also be extremely disruptive for patients and clinicians. Patients that need a new prescription will require additional prescriber visits that could disrupt continuity of care and increase the likelihood of care delays, increasing the risk of hospitalizations and increased overall healthcare costs.

Given these complexities outlined above, we urge the Board to reconsider making any decision related to the proposed review of Ozempic®. Further, we urge the Board to refrain from seeking to impose a UPL, as it would ultimately undermine the Board's goals of promoting access and affordability.

***

Maintaining access to Ozempic® is crucial for patients living with type 2 diabetes. With its proven effectiveness in lowering blood sugar levels and reducing the risk of cardiovascular events, Ozempic® represents a valuable treatment option for managing diabetes and improving overall health outcomes. Ensuring access to Ozempic® enables patients to realize its therapeutic benefits, which ultimately leads to better disease management, enhanced quality of life, and the potential for lower healthcare costs associated with diabetes-related complications.

Novo Nordisk is committed to working with patients and payers to ensure that those who benefit from our medications have access to them. Because Ozempic® is both highly effective and broadly affordable, we respectfully request that the Board decline to conduct a cost review for Ozempic®, and caution that the unintended consequences of pursing a UPL could upend care for thousands of Marylanders living with diabetes.

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[18] Novo Nordisk internal data on file.
[19] The Federal Trade Commission. Interim Staff Report. July 2024. "Pharmacy Benefit Mangers: Powerful Middlemen Inflating Drug Costs and Squeezing Main Street Pharmacy." Pharmacy Benefit Managers: The Powerful Middlemen Inflating Drug Costs and Squeezing Main Street Pharmacies (ftc.gov)
[20] Fein AJ. "The Top Pharmacy Benefit Managers of 2021: The Big Get Even Bigger." Drug Channels. April 5, 2022. https://www.drugchannels.net/2022/04/the-top-pharmacy-benefit-managers-of.html
[21] *Id. at 15*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and for your consideration of the issues raised in this letter. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Ryan Urgo, Head of Policy, at RVUR@novonordisk.com for additional information.

July 22, 2024

Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board
16900 Science Drive, Suite 112-114
Bowie, MD 20715

RE: SIX DRUGS CHOSEN FOR COST REVIEW
(FARXIGA, JARDIANCE, OZEMPIC, TRULICITY, DUPIXENT, SKYRIZI)

Dear Members of the Board,

As a broad coalition of advocacy organizations representing patients, caregivers and health care providers, we write concerning the value of the six drugs chosen by the Prescription Drug Affordability Board for cost review and consideration of affordability. The Coalition has previously submitted comments expressing concern that methods available to the Board to lower health care spending – the setting of upper payment limits, in particular – may restrict patients' access to needed treatments. Therefore, we are hopeful that the Board will consider the value of access to these drugs when considering affordability.

The Value of Care Coalition believes that value is best determined by those who know – providers who prescribe medicines and patients who rely on the medicine to keep their medical conditions stable. Just as the term "affordability" has many different definitions and could be determined by a multitude of criteria, so does "value". Cost and value are not the same thing, but cost, or affordability, cannot be fully considered without accounting for value.

DIABETES TREATMENTS

At the May 20 meeting of the Prescription Drug Affordability Board, the Board voted to review four drugs with an indication for type 2 diabetes as a "class". It is not clear what this grouping means for how reviews are conducted, or the drugs are compared to each other or other treatments, and it is not clear if such a grouping is appropriate considering the different types of treatments within the group.

FARXIGA, JARDIANCE, OZEMPIC, TRULICITY

Two of these treatments, Farxiga and Jardiance, are SGLT-2 inhibitors. Two others, Ozempic and Trulicity, are GLP1 agonists. While each drug is used to treat type 2 diabetes, they are not all the same and physicians value each for their unique role in their toolbox of treatments.

For example, Farxiga and Jardiance both treat chronic kidney disease and heart failure independent of diabetes, but are commonly used for patients with both heart failure or chronic kidney disease and diabetes. Farxiga has also been shown to reduce cardiovascular death with certain kinds of heart failure, while Jardiance may be prescribed for people with diabetes and established cardiovascular disease or stroke. These two drugs are taken orally.

Ozempic and Trulicity are commonly prescribed for type 2 diabetes and weight loss. Ozempic has also been shown to reduce risk of cardiovascular hospitalizations and death. These two drugs are injected.

There is a well-established connection between diabetes and cardiovascular disease. People with diabetes are at a greater risk of heart failure.[1] In fact, according to the Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health, "people with type 2 diabetes are twice as likely to develop heart disease and if they struggle with obesity their risk is even higher."[2]

Cardiovascular disease was the cause of death for over 900,000 Americans in 2020 – more than all forms of cancer and Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease combined. Meanwhile, in 2020, heart attacks occurred approximately every 40 seconds, and someone died of stroke every 3 minutes 17 seconds in the United States. As of 2018, the prevalence of adult obesity stood at 43% of males and 41.9% of females in America with an upward trend over the previous twenty years.[3]

In the face of these statistics, physicians value treatments tailored to patients' unique needs and comorbidities. Additionally, loss of access to these medications could force doctors to veer from evidence-based guidelines.

At the same time, the value patients find in these treatments is immense. Without access to a treatment that works for them, that they're comfortable with and that keeps their condition stable, their diabetes may be less well controlled. This can lead to weight gain and higher risk for other complications such as eye disease, neuropathy, foot complications and limb loss, gum disease, hearing loss, and cardiovascular disease, chronic kidney disease, and stroke.[4] These comorbidities are each debilitating in their own way, causing patients pain, suffering and an inability to go about their day to day lives as they otherwise would.

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[1] CDC, *Your Heart and Diabetes,* https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/diabetes-complications/diabetes-and-your-heart.html

[2] Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health, *The Diabetes-Cardiovascular Connection, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RshYNrftKwo*

[3] American Heart Association, *2023 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Updated Fact Sheet, https://professional.heart.org/en/science-news/-/media/453448D7D79948B39D5851D1FF2A0CFE.ashx*

[4] American Diabetes Association, *Diabetes Complications, https://diabetes.org/about-diabetes/complications*

Left untreated, the progression of chronic kidney disease can lead to cardiovascular complications, hospitalizations, dialysis and kidney transplant.

Likewise, the benefits of these treatments related to cardiovascular diseases are profound. Consider a patient who suffers a stroke. Lucky to be alive, they may face paralysis causing them to lose mobility, have speech and language problems, vision problems, trouble thinking and memory issues. They can no longer work or even hold their child or grandchild. The value of treatment proven to reduce stroke risk is extraordinary to this patient.

In addition to the value found in quality-of-life aspects provided by these treatments, a forced switch to another medication may result disease progression, symptoms re-emerge or new side effects surfacing, more doctor visits, hospitalizations, additional treatments, and lost economic output in terms of missed work. In fact, the American Heart Association estimates the indirect cost of cardiovascular disease alone to be "$155.9 billion in lost productivity/mortality" from 2018-2019.[5]

DUPIXENT

Dupixent is a biologic approved for several conditions, including eczema, asthma, nasal polyps and eosinophilic esophagitis, including approval for young children for many of those indications. Prescribers value Dupixent for its versatility as asthma and nasal polyps often coexist, as do asthma and eczema. Like other treatments being assessed, Dupixent treats multiple debilitating conditions at the same time.

From the patient perspective, consider a patient with severe asthma and nasal polyps. Symptoms of polyps can include runny nose or congestion, postnasal drip, loss of smell and taste, pain in the face and teeth, headache and snoring.[6] With proper treatment, polyps shrink. The patient no longer needs surgery to remove polyps. Their nose stops running and they can breathe again. They can smell again and taste food. And they may feel better than they have in decades.

In the short term, asthma patients can have trouble breathing, suffer from wheezing, coughing and tightness or pain in the chest. Symptoms can be exacerbated by simple changes in the weather, seasonal cycles, and many other common triggers. [7]

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[5] American Heart Association, *2023 Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics Updated Fact Sheet, https://professional.heart.org/en/science-news/-/media/453448D7D79948B39D5851D1FF2A0CFE.ashx*

[6] Mayo Clinic, *Nasal Polyps, https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/nasal-polyps/symptoms-causes/syc-20351888#:*

[7] Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, *Asthma Facts, https://aafa.org/asthma/asthma-facts/*

Like many chronic conditions, uncontrolled asthma can lead to further complications. Damage to airways and lungs can occur, sleep can be disrupted, pregnancy complications can arise, patients face an increased risk of infection, gastroesophageal reflux disease and obesity.[8] On average, 10 Americans die from asthma each day and nearly all deaths are avoidable with proper treatment and care.[9]

Conversely, when not facing common asthma symptoms or reducing the impact of common triggers, patients value the ability to live their daily lives, missing fewer days of work, exercising, playing outdoors with their friends or their children.

For a patient with eczema, the impact of proper treatment can be equally valuable. According to the National Eczema Association (NEA), 10% of Americans have some form of eczema. Unbearable itching can occur, lasting 12 or more hours per day. Some patients have severe pain. About a third of patients face insomnia, shorter sleep time, daytime sleepiness and fatigue. NEA states that hospitalizations due to flares of atopic dermatitis "and related infections is associated with an 8.3-year reduction in lifespan compared to the general population."[10]

Without their condition controlled, sores emerge requiring regular antibiotics. Lifestyle impacts emerge. Patients report feeling angry or embarrassed about their appearance due to their disease, causing them to limit interactions with others. They turn down job or educational opportunities. Children and teens are bullied because of their disease. Mental health can suffer as feelings of isolation, frustration, helplessness and sadness set in. Economically speaking, NEA reports "nearly 5.9 million work days annually are lost due to eczema."[11]

SKYRIZI

Plaque psoriasis, psoriatic arthritis, Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis are all treated with Skyrizi. The inflammatory bowel diseases can be life-threatening, while psoriatic arthritis can be debilitating, and plaque psoriasis can be associated with severe complications. Like other treatments chosen for assessment, prescribers value Skyrizi in their toolbox because of its versatility. It is not uncommon for psoriatic arthritis and inflammatory bowel disease to occur simultaneously, and Skyrizi is one of only two drugs in its class that are approved to treat the joint, skin and bowel conditions.

Clinicians also note that the medical benefits of this drug can be life-changing for patients, and switching to another drug on the PDAB's therapeutic alternative list may be inappropriate for

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[8] Asthma.com, *Uncontrolled Asthma's Effects Over Time,* https://www.asthma.com/treating-asthma/effects-of-asthma/

[9] Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, *Asthma Facts, https://aafa.org/asthma/asthma-facts/*

[10] National Eczema Association, *Eczema Stats, https://nationaleczema.org/research/eczema-facts/*

[11] ibid

the patient's condition. Moreover, when talking about autoimmune diseases, it is important to understand that people sometimes have an initial response to a treatment followed by a change in their immune system which causes them to need a different treatment. Similarly, a patient switched to another drug followed by a return to the original drug may find that the original drug does not work anymore due to changes in the immune system. Therefore, prescribers value access to multiple treatments with a variety of mechanisms of action and the ability to maintain access to the treatment as long as it's working.

Among psoriasis patients, plaque psoriasis is the most common type of psoriasis and causes scaly, itchy, painful patches on skin.[12] If not controlled, this can lead to frequent complications such as infections, requiring additional doctor visits and treatments. Psoriatic skin disease can cause superinfections than can lead to life-threatening sepsis. Unfortunately, about one in three people with plaque psoriasis will develop psoriatic arthritis.[13]

For patients whose psoriatic arthritis is newly controlled by proper, effective treatment, the elimination of joint inflammation leads to incredible gains in quality of life. Where their disease can be deforming, debilitating and deadly due to an increased risk of early heart disease, and it had previously caused them to be unable to work or do hobbies, play with their kids or be active in their communities, effective treatment allows them to function, work, and go about their daily lives.

Meanwhile patients with inflammatory bowel disease face persistent diarrhea, abdominal pain, bleeding, weight loss and fatigue.[14] This disease puts patients at risk for gastrointestinal cancer and can lead to removal of portions of the gastrointestinal tract. If the disease is active, the patient may be bleeding and not absorbing food, which can be deadly. With proper treatment, symptoms can be managed, and disease progression can be slowed or stopped, preventing these outcomes.

Unfortunately, inflammation in the gut, skin and joints can flare relentlessly and simultaneously. Without proper treatment, this can lead to worse health outcomes and absorption of more medical resources, time and cost for the system and the patient.

CONCLUSION

Each treatment selected for review by the Maryland Prescription Drug Affordability Board provides unique value to prescribers and the patients they treat.

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[12] National Psoriasis Foundation, *Plaque Psoriasis,* https://www.psoriasis.org/plaque/
[13] National Psoriasis Foundation, *About Psoriasis,* https://www.psoriasis.org/about-psoriasis/
[14] CDC, *What is inflammatory bowel disease?,* https://www.cdc.gov/ibd/what-is-IBD.htm#

In each instance, prescribers value the ability to treat their patients more efficiently and holistically as the conditions the drugs treat often exist simultaneously (i.e. psoriatic arthritis and inflammatory bowel disease) or create greater risk for each other (i.e. diabetes and cardiovascular disease). To be able to effectively treat one condition while also lowering the risk of another with one medication is impactful to their practice of medicine. While there may be other treatments for each indication, each drug listed is a valuable tool in the toolbox for doctors as they assess the medical needs of each individual patient.

Patients value the ways these treatments change their lives for the better. What was once a deadly diagnosis is something that can now be managed. They now have the power to control their symptoms and do things many Americans may take for granted – work, play, interact with friends, family and colleagues in a meaningful, productive way, exercise, go outside, and even simply breathe normally.

While it may be difficult to properly quantify the value doctors find in these treatments or that patients receive in terms of quality of life, these benefits cannot be ignored when considering cost and affordability. The Value of Care Coalition asks that as the Board evaluates the affordability of the treatments its chosen, it considers the value these treatments provide to clinicians and patients in Maryland.

Sincerely,

Derek Flowers
Executive Director
Value of Care Coalition