

Pharmacy Benefact

A BULLETIN FOR PHARMACY SERVICE PROVIDERS FROM ALBERTA BLUE CROSS

Number 920 • December 2020

Step therapy for select narcotic drug products effective January 1, 2021, for Alberta Blue Cross individual and employer-sponsored group plans

Effective **January 1, 2021**, select narcotic drug products for pain management will now be eligible via step therapy on select Alberta Blue Cross individual and employer-sponsored group plans. These drug products include select long-acting or higher potency narcotics.

Summary of the changes based on product category

Product category	Current listing status	Listing status change
Select long-acting or higher potency narcotics	Open benefits*	Change to step therapy

*Fentora is an exception in that it is currently listed via special authorization.

Step therapy is an enhancement that may provide drug coverage without the members having to visit their doctor to request special authorization. Step therapy will require the use of one or more first-line drug products within a given time period before a step therapy drug product (second-line drug product) is approved for coverage. In cases where prior history of a prerequisite medication is not available, pharmacists using professional judgment will be able to use an intervention code(s) (as noted below) to submit a claim, if appropriate.

Note: Special authorization continues to be available for these products if step therapy adjudication is not appropriate. Additionally, it is important to note that patients who are already receiving coverage for long-acting or higher potency narcotics prior to the change in status will continue to do so.

Outlined on the next pages are the narcotic drugs eligible for step therapy, as well as examples of first-line therapies patients are required to have tried before being eligible for the step therapy drug product(s).

Step therapy narcotic drug products for pain management

In order to meet eligibility criteria for select long-acting or higher potency narcotics for pain management, patients must have tried the short-acting lower potency narcotics.

Step therapy drug(s)	First-line drug(s) required before member is eligible for step therapy drug
Long-acting or higher potency narcotics Examples: Butrans, Codeine Contin, Fentanyl patches, MS Contin, Hydromorph Contin, Oxyneo, injectable products, methadone for pain products <i>Excludes opioid dependence products and narcotics listed via special authorization</i>	Short-acting lower potency narcotics Examples: Statex, Dilaudid, OXY-IR, Codeine (immediate release products and combination products) <i>Excludes tramadol products and exempted codeine products</i>

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Claims adjudication

The Alberta Blue Cross PRIDERT claim adjudication system will read the member/patient's claims history to determine if the required first-line therapy drug product(s) have been claimed within the preceding six months. Claims for the step therapy drug products will continue to be covered as long as they have been claimed within the preceding six months, based on the date of service of the claim.

If the above-noted criteria for coverage are not met, the claim may be rejected with the following response codes:

- **QO** - preference or step drug available; and
- **CP** - eligible for special authorization.

Intervention code

When the pharmacy provider has supporting documentation of the patient meeting the above-noted criteria, coverage may be provided if either of the following intervention codes are used:

- **UP** - first-line therapy ineffective. For example, where immediate release oral preparations did not work and around the clock extended release products would be required, or
- **UQ** - first-line therapy not tolerated by patient. For example, intolerable side effects with high dose of immediate release products.

In certain circumstances where a first-line therapy may not be clinically appropriate such as in cancer pain or palliative care, the **UP** intervention code may be used.

Special authorization

The members may discuss with their physicians whether it is appropriate to pursue special authorization for coverage of the step therapy drug products in those instances where

- the automated review of the member/patient claims history does not identify claims for the step therapy drug products or required previous therapies, and/or
- the pharmacy provider does not have supporting documentation of the member/patient meeting the above-noted criteria.

When you have questions:

For assistance with benefit or claim inquiries, please contact an Alberta Blue Cross Pharmacy Services Provider Relations contact centre representative at:

780-498-8370 (Edmonton and area) • **403-294-4041** (Calgary and area) • **1-800-361-9632** (toll free)

FAX 780-498-8406 (Edmonton and area) • **FAX 1-877-305-9911** (toll free)

Alberta Blue Cross offers online access to current Pharmacy Benefacts and supplemental claiming information to assist with the submission of your direct bill drug claims. Visit ab.bluecross.ca/providers/pharmacy-home.php

