



April 9, 2024

The Honorable Virginia Lyons
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
Chair
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

The Honorable David Weeks
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
Vice Chair
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

RE: Support for H.766 – Reform to Step Therapy Protocols

Dear Chair Lyons and Vice Chair Weeks,

On behalf of the Alliance for Gout Awareness, I am writing in support of H.766. This legislation is necessary to ensure that patients living with gout in Vermont have timely access to provider-prescribed treatments by providing clear guidelines around step therapy protocols.

About Gout and The Alliance for Gout Awareness

Gout is a chronic form of inflammatory arthritis affecting more than 9 million Americans. Gout occurs due to a buildup of uric acid in the body. When excess uric acid builds up in the body, it deposits around joints and can lead to swollen joints and sudden, intensely painful attacks that can be debilitating.¹ It is a chronic medical condition that, left untreated, can result in more frequent and painful attacks and joint damage.² It can also increase patients’ risk for other severe medical conditions such as kidney disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and stroke.³

The [Alliance for Gout Awareness](#) (AGA) aims to reduce stigma and empower patients by improving public understanding of gout. AGA collaborates with our network of member organizations to heighten public awareness, address common misconceptions, and encourage patients to acknowledge the disease’s impact and seek appropriate treatment.

Step Therapy Protocols Can Harm Patients Living with Gout

Insurers often use a variety of approaches to keep their costs low—often at the expense of gout patients’ health.⁴ Step therapy, also known as “fail first,” is an approach that requires patients to try and fail insurer-preferred medications before they can access the medication(s) prescribed by their provider. The insurer-preferred medications are often older therapies that are less expensive to the insurer. However, these may not offer relief to patients, and delays in accessing provider-prescribed medications may lead to more frequent and painful gout attacks, increased trips to the ER/Urgent Care, and increased health risks.⁵

¹ Alliance for Gout Awareness. What is Gout? <https://goutalliance.org/what-is-gout/>

² Alliance for Gout Awareness. When Gout Goes Untreated. <https://goutalliance.org/resources/when-gout-goes-untreated/>

³ Arthritis Foundation Comorbid Conditions and Gout. <https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/about-arthritis/related-conditions/other-diseases/five-conditions-linked-with-gout>

⁴ Alliance for Gout Awareness. A Roadmap to Better Care for Gout. <https://goutalliance.org/resources/a-roadmap-to-better-care-for-gout/>

⁵ Alliance for Gout Awareness. Step Therapy & Gout. <https://goutalliance.org/resources/step-therapy-gout/>

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While gout is not curable, it is treatable when approached from a holistic view of managing acute gout flares and addressing chronic gout. Gout is a systemic disease that requires providers to utilize therapies to relieve flare symptoms and decrease the amount of uric acid in the blood. In addition to the severe physical pain associated with gout attacks, the condition can affect a patient's social, emotional, and mental health and well-being, which can threaten the overall quality of life for patients.⁶ A provider's understanding of a gout patient's medical history and uric acid levels is essential in providing appropriate short and long-term treatment for their patients.

Treatment decisions must be determined by the patient's provider as opposed to by an insurer's step therapy protocols that interrupt appropriate access to treatment and limit a patient-centered approach.

H.766 Supports Patient Access to Provider-Prescribed Treatment in Vermont

H.766 would support patient-centered gout care by reforming step therapy practices. The legislation requires insurers to enact transparent and efficient processes for patients and providers to request step therapy protocol exemptions. This legislation does not prohibit step therapy protocols or limit the number of steps required by an insurer but defines circumstances that would allow for exemptions. With these processes in place, patients living with gout in Vermont would be able to better access treatment prescribed by their provider in a timely and appropriate manner. As a result, patients are able to proactively and effectively manage their condition.

On behalf of the Alliance for Gout Awareness and our membership, thank you for your leadership on this important issue and for supporting patient access. If we can provide further details or answer any questions, please contact Lacey Teal at lteal@allianceforpatientaccess.org.

Sincerely,

Lacey Teal

Lacey Teal
Senior Program Associate
Alliance for Gout Awareness

Co-Signing Organizations:

Alliance for Patient Access
American Kidney Fund
Infusion Access Foundation
Lupus and Allied Diseases Association, Inc.
National Infusion Center Association
Rheumatology Nurses Society
U.S. Pain Foundation

⁶ Alliance for Gout Awareness. The Journey Toward Disease Management: A National Survey of Gout Patients. <https://goutalliance.org/resources/the-journey-toward-disease-management-a-national-survey-of-gout-patients/>