



Vermont House Committee on Health Care
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Re: Concerns with S.98

April 10, 2024

Chair Houghton, Vice Chair McFaun, members of the committee,

On behalf of the Chronic Disease Coalition, I would like to raise some significant concerns around S.98, which proposes the Green Mountain Care Board assume responsibility for prescription drug affordability in Vermont. While the intent behind this bill is to address the costs of prescription medications, we believe that the proposed approach may have unintended consequences on the accessibility and affordability of treatments for chronic patients — especially those living with rare conditions (roughly one in 10 Americans).

The Chronic Disease Coalition is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to raising the patient voice and perspective in healthcare policymaking. The coalition was founded in 2015 to advocate for people living with long-term or lifelong health conditions. Our patient advisors and partners represent common diseases (e.g., diabetes, kidney disease, arthritis), rare diseases (e.g., Guillain-Barré syndrome, hypoparathyroidism), and many other conditions whose scale and scope are still not understood.

Having access to effective, affordable treatment is essential to both chronic and acute patients. Unfortunately, the imposition of cost controls actually doesn't help individual patients who are currently struggling to afford medications. It does, however, lead to a reduction in the availability of effective medications.

In the U.S., we rely on the private sector to innovate and develop new treatments. Legislation like this dampens the research investments needed to find new treatments and cures. There are other, better ways to directly improve affordability for patients, including meaningful regulations around utilization management practices, protecting third-party patient assistance programs, and many others.

These boards, by design, are inclined to employ a one-size-fits-all approach that does not consider the unique characteristics of different chronic conditions and the varying levels of accessibility of their respective treatments. Patients living with these conditions are not well served by blanket regulations.

Finally, it has been the experience of many patient advocates that these state-appointed boards do not adequately consider the real-world impacts on those living with chronic conditions. Patient experiences must be fully considered before enacting any policy or regulation that may impact their access to life-saving medication, and often, patients have limited opportunities to make their voices heard.

While the goal of making prescription drugs more affordable is laudable, and one that we share, we believe that S.98 may have unintended consequences that could negatively impact the lives of individuals living with chronic diseases.

We strongly recommend that alternative solutions with direct benefits to patients are explored, such as increasing transparency in drug pricing and pharmacy benefit management, expanding coverage options for chronic patients, reforming costly insurance practices like step therapy, prior authorization, and copay accumulator programs, and more. As healthcare leaders in Vermont, chronic patients are depending on you to make real progress to improve their health outcomes.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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