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Re: Response to Public Comment on GCR 23-144: [VPharm Coverage Rule Update](#)

One comment was received and is included below along with a response from the Agency of Human Services (AHS). No other comments were received on this proposed rule filing.

Public Comment:

I am submitting my comment in favor of the proposed amendment to VPharm Rules 5450 to reflect the expansion of drug coverage under VPharm 2 and 3 that went into effect July 1, 2022. As you are likely aware, four (04) in ten (10) Medicare-Medicaid enrollees live on annual income of less than \$10,000 ([A Profile of Medicare-Medicaid Enrollees \(Dual Eligibles\)](#)). Providing additional assistance to cover the cost of a broader scope of needed prescriptions is obviously a significant benefit to these individuals. I applaud The Agency of Human Services (AHS) for not only expanding the list of pharmaceuticals that qualify for this supplemental coverage but also making this benefit available to those who have applied for Medicare prescription drug benefits but who have not yet received the coverage due to operational problems with Medicare. Administrative roadblocks and errors can create unnecessary delays to access of needed care, not to mention significant frustration and stress for those experiencing them. This rule change provides a solution for this vulnerable population so they can still receive their needed medications and supplies in a timely manner.

In addition to this expansion of supplemental coverage for existing medications covered under the Vermont Medicaid program, I encourage AHS to consider including anti-obesity and weight-loss medications in the list of drugs covered. While this may increase the expenditure of Medicaid dollars spent on pharmacy benefits it could support the reduction of costs in other areas of the program. People who are overweight or obese are at a higher risk of other serious medical problems, such as diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol and blood pressure, and mental illnesses ([Health Effects of Overweight and Obesity](#)). With Medicare beneficiaries you are dealing with an older population who may have a difficult time incorporating sufficient amounts of physical activity or other lifestyle changes needed to reduce their weight. Covering these weight loss medications can support getting these individuals to a healthy weight and at the same time reducing other medical issues and the high costs of the drugs needed to manage them.

Thank you for your time,

Interested Public Party

State Response:

The Agency of Human Services (AHS) appreciates the support of the proposed amendments to the VPharm Coverage rule (5450). AHS also acknowledges the request by the commenter for coverage of weight loss medications to address obesity. Vermont Medicaid (and subsequently VPharm) currently excludes drugs prescribed for weight loss in its Medicaid State Plan. While this request is outside of the scope of this rulemaking effort, the agency will take this comment into consideration.