



October 4, 2024

Ohio Department of Medicaid
Clinical Services Department
PO BOX 1030
Columbus, OH 43216

Dear Members of the Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments in advance of the October 9 Committee Meeting. I am writing on behalf the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), the leading patient organization for people with asthma and allergies and the oldest asthma and allergy patient group in the world. AAFA's mission is to save lives and reduce the burden of disease for people with asthma and allergies through support, advocacy, education and research.

Due to the severe impact of asthma across the state of Ohio, and the importance of access to a range of treatment options, we are writing to strongly urge the committee to include all immunomodulator drugs for asthma on the preferred drug list.

In 2021, over 1 in 10 of all adults in Ohio was living with asthma (10.4%) along with 5.9% of all Ohio children.^{1,2} Like across the country, the burden of asthma falls disproportionately along racial and ethnic lines. As reported by the Ohio Department of Health in 2021³:

- Asthma was 1.5 times more prevalent among Black adults than white adults, and twice as prevalent among Black children than white children;

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Adult asthma prevalence and morbidity tables: Table C1. National Center for Environmental Health, Division of Environmental Health Science and Practice. <https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/brfss/2021/tableC1.html>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). Child asthma prevalence and morbidity tables: Table C1. National Center for Environmental Health, Division of Environmental Health Science and Practice. <https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/brfss/2021/child/tableC1.html>

³ Ohio Department of Health, Asthma Disparities in Ohio (2021). Available at <https://odh.ohio.gov/know-our-programs/asthma-program/media/asthma-disparities-2021>



- Black adults and children had much higher hospitalization and ER visit rates due to asthma than white adults and children; and
- Black Ohio residents experienced an asthma death rate more than twice as high as that among white residents.

Cleveland and Columbus are particularly hard hit by asthma. AAFA conducts an analysis each year to rank the 100 most populated metropolitan areas in the US based on asthma prevalence, emergency department visits for asthma, and deaths due to asthma.⁴ As of 2024, Cleveland was the 6th highest of these “Asthma Capitals” across the country, and Columbus was the 20th.

For many patients with mild asthma, routine medications can keep the disease in check and prevent hospitalizations or other serious complications. Moderate-to-severe asthma, however, can be extremely hard to treat. The relatively recent emergence of newer biologics that target the immunological pathway in asthma patients has created new opportunities for effective control of asthma.

These immunomodulators for asthma should be on the preferred drug list and should not be subject to step therapy or prior authorization requirements. “Fail first” policies or other such steps would delay getting the appropriate care to patients who need these medications, potentially leading to further asthma attacks and complications. Because different people with asthma respond better to different drugs, their healthcare providers should be able to swiftly and efficiently prescribe the medication that they think will best improve their health status. Prior authorization requirements can result in unnecessary delays and ultimately as a deterrent to prescriptions, potentially putting these crucial drugs entirely out of reach for patients whose providers lack the bandwidth or staff to process prior authorization requests.

AAFA is very aware that these new drugs – like many drugs and devices in our healthcare system – are costly. It is a priority for our organization to address the high cost of drugs, particularly ensuring that costs do not hinder patient access. However, putting prior authorization or step therapy requirements on immunomodulators for asthma is not the right way to save funds. It will negatively impact health, and

⁴ Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, “2024 Asthma Capitals: The Most Challenging Places to Live with Asthma.” Available at <https://aafa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/aafa-2024-asthma-capitals-report.pdf>



contribute to existing disparities, in a treatment area where low barriers to accessing these important treatments are crucial.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Mendez
President and Chief Executive Officer
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America