

What you need to know about GLP-1 drugs

What are GLP-1 drugs?

GLP-1s (glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists) mimic the GLP-1 hormone, which regulates metabolism and food intake. These medications delay the time it takes for food to move through the digestive system, increase the feeling of being full, and control appetite.

What do GLP-1s treat?

GLP-1s were developed for the treatment of type 2 diabetes. GLP-1s have also gained attention for their potential in managing obesity.

What GLP-1s does Priority Health cover for the treatment of type 2 diabetes?

Priority Health covers two GLP-1s, Mounjaro and Trulicity, for the treatment of type 2 diabetes. These are on the formulary at tier 2. These drugs are also on the chronic condition drug list, a list of medications that process at the applicable cost-share tier ahead of deductible for all PriorityHSA plans, as well as groups that choose this as a rider.

Why does Priority Health cover these two GLP-1s for diabetes?

While there are many GLP-1s available on the market, the decision to cover Mounjaro and Trulicity for diabetes is based on the medications' cost-effectiveness. Priority Health's guiding principle is to first evaluate a medication for safety and efficacy, and when there are multiple similar drugs available, to then evaluate the category for lowest net cost. Both have demonstrated they can significantly lower A1c and reduce associated disease outcomes.

What about coverage of GLP-1s for weight loss?

GLP-1s strictly for weight loss are not a covered benefit. Priority Health does not recommend coverage of these medications to treat weight loss. This recommendation is based on limited clinical data on long-term outcomes, safety concerns, the prevalence of side effects and the questionable value of the drugs compared to their cost.

What does the clinical evidence say about using GLP-1s for weight loss?

Obesity remains a significant global health concern and contributes to long-term comorbidities, such as osteoarthritis, heart attacks and stroke. However, despite clinical trials that state GLP-1s can address these conditions, long-term data on clinical outcomes remain limited.

Real-world evidence also suggests safety issues for those taking these drugs for weight loss. Side effects include paralysis of the stomach, nausea, vomiting, suicidal thoughts¹, and concerns about osteoporosis and frailty, especially in older adults². Most patients choose to discontinue the drugs due to these side effects with just 27% of patients taking a GLP-1 drug for weight loss after one year.³ This isn't a sustainable solution because the weight comes back once the patient stops taking the medication.

Plus, the cost of these drugs extraordinarily high. The average wholesale price per month of a GLP-1 drug for weight-loss averages between \$1,227 and \$1,619, depending on the drug.

Do people treating their diabetes with GLP-1s experience the same side effects?

Not typically. Side effects are dose related, and not as prevalent in the lower GLP-1 doses generally used for the treatment of type 2 diabetes.

What about a self-funded employer who wants to offer these drugs to their employees?

Priority Health advises against this option due to clinical and financial reasons, however, an enhanced weight loss rider covering GLP-1s for weight loss is available to self-funded groups only.

What drugs are included in the enhanced weight-loss rider?

Drugs in the enhanced weight-loss rider include Wegovy and Saxenda.

How is Priority Health addressing the demand for GLP-1s for weight loss?

While GLP-1s hold promise as an option in a comprehensive approach to weight management, their efficacy remains a subject of debate. Priority Health is committed to providing affordable and data-driven health care options to our members and employer groups. We continue to explore wellness and lifestyle programs, some that include the potential use of the

GLP-1s to ensure long-term sustainable benefits for our members. Yet, we need evaluate these medications against their safety profile, clinical outcomes, cost implications, and usefulness.

Does Priority Health offer any programs that support a healthy weight?

Priority Health offers members a variety of ways to encourage a healthy weight and lifestyle.

The Wellbeing Hub, powered by Virgin Pulse, helps members achieve their health goals through a digital platform that's personalized for members based on their unique interests, health status and wellness habits. Members can sign up for health and wellness challenges to improve their health and wellbeing.

Priority Health makes getting moving easy through the Active&Fit Direct program. For one low enrollment fee and an additional monthly charge, this program provides members access to thousands of fitness centers and on-demand workout videos to help them get and stay active at home or at the gym.

Members with prediabetes or those at risk of developing type 2 diabetes are eligible for our diabetes prevention program (DPP) through Omada. The DPP program is an evidence-based structured lifestyle change program for adults over age 18. It can reduce their risk for type 2 diabetes while lowering their starting body weight and helping them adopt healthy eating habits along with other benefits.

¹ EU investigates Ozempic, weight-loss drug Saxenda after suicidal thoughts reported, Reuters, July 2023.

² The Race Is On to Stop Ozempic Muscle Loss, New York Times, February 2024.

³ Real-world analysis of GLP-1a drugs for weight loss finds low adherence and increased cost in first year, Prime Therapeutics, July 2023.