



# 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.

## 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.

## Are there any prior authorization or step therapy requirements for obtaining a GLP-1 prescription?

**Traditional formulary:** No prior authorization is required if the member has a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes on file.

**Optimized formulary:** Prior authorization is required; the patient must meet all the following requirements before this drug is covered:

- Patient has a diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes mellitus; AND
- Patient is at least 18 years of age; AND
- Trial and failure of, or intolerance of at least 2 oral antidiabetic agents (used in combination) OR insulin after 3 continuous months of receiving maximal daily doses in conjunction with diet and exercise (as defined in the American Diabetes Standards of Care) and not achieving adequate glycemic control (must be within the last 6 months); AND
- Hemoglobin A1c less than or equal to 9%, but not less than 7%

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

GLP-1 medications used solely for weight loss are not currently a covered benefit. However, when combined with structured clinical and lifestyle support, such as Virta's Sustainable Weight Loss with Responsible Prescribing, available as a buy-up program, GLP-1s may support meaningful and lasting outcomes.

While we continue to evaluate their clinical effectiveness, safety, and value, our findings show that sustainable weight loss is best achieved through a comprehensive approach. GLP-1s can be a helpful component of that strategy, but they are not a standalone solution.

### **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, and concerns about osteoporosis and frailty, especially in older adults.<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> decreasing further down to 15% after two years. This isn't a sustainable solution because the weight comes back once the patient stops taking the medication.

Plus, the cost of these drugs is extraordinarily high. The average wholesale price per month of a GLP-1 drug for weight-loss ranges between \$1,271 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.

### **In an enhanced weight-loss rider, are there any prior authorization or step therapy requirements needed for drug coverage?**

No.

### **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 outside of a comprehensive approach 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 GLP-1s to ensure long-term sustainable benefits for our members. Yet, we need to 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.

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.

Through employer-sponsored programs, members have access to three clinically proven solutions through Virta Health: Sustainable Weight Loss, Sustainable Weight Loss with Responsible Prescribing, and Diabetes Reversal.<sup>3</sup> These solutions combine personalized support and provider-led care teams to help members sustain weight loss, safely lower reliance on costly medications, and build lasting meaningful changes.

<sup>1</sup>The Race Is On to Stop Ozempic Muscle Loss, New York Times, February 2024.

<sup>2</sup>Real-world analysis of GLP-1a drugs for weight loss finds low adherence and increased cost in first year, Prime Therapeutics, July 2023.

<sup>3</sup>Virta defines Type 2 Diabetes Reversal as achieving an A1c below 6.5% without using diabetes medications other than metformin.

This is medically termed "remission," as diabetes can return if lifestyle changes aren't maintained