

Update: Changes coming for select weight loss drugs for some commercial members

We updated this communication to clarify the weight management program participation documentation requirement for the new prior authorization criteria. We added a note about how regulatory guidelines may affect the start date of the new authorization. We also clarified that the new criteria will not apply to MESSA members. In addition, self-funded groups that cover GLP-1 drugs for weight loss may continue using their current prior authorization criteria.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network are changing how we approach coverage of glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonist, known as GLP-1, drugs indicated for weight loss for our fully insured large group commercial members. These drugs include:

- Saxenda® (liraglutide)
- Wegovy® (semaglutide)
- Zepbound® (tirzepatide)

Here's what will change:

- **Aug. 1, 2024** – Prior authorizations for these drugs will end at midnight on July 31. A new prior authorization request will be required, and new prior authorization criteria will be applied for these members for dates of service from Aug. 1 through Dec. 31, 2024. Some members will require a new prescription to align with the new prior authorization criteria if the original prescriber doesn't have an established relationship with the member or hasn't seen the member in person.

Note: Regulatory guidelines require the prior authorization to remain active for a minimum of 60 days from the date of approval. Therefore, these notifications may indicate an authorization date after July 31. The new authorization end date will be printed on the member's letter.

- **Jan. 1, 2025** – Coverage for GLP-1 weight loss drugs for fully-insured large group commercial members will end starting Jan. 1, 2025. For group members with a plan renewal date other than Jan. 1, the coverage will end on the renewal date.

We're notifying the members affected by these changes and their prescribers.

Keep reading for more information.

We're changing prior authorization criteria

For dates of service from Aug. 1 through Dec. 31, 2024, Saxenda, Wegovy and Zepbound will have new prior authorization criteria for fully insured large group commercial members.

The new criteria will not apply to MESSA group members. In addition, self-funded groups that cover GLP-1 drugs for weight loss may continue using their current prior authorization criteria.

All current authorizations for these medications for fully insured large group commercial members will expire on July 31, 2024, and the following new criteria will apply:

- The member must be 18 years or older.
- The member must have a baseline (weight prior to starting therapy) body mass index of 35 or higher.
- The medication must be prescribed by a health care provider who has an established relationship with the member and has seen the member in person.
- The prescriber must document the member's current weight (within 30 days). For members who wish to continue weight loss GLP-1 therapy after Aug. 1, their prescriber must also document the member's baseline weight (weight prior to starting therapy) with the prior authorization submission. Please reference the January provider alert, [Include complete clinical information when submitting prior authorization requests for weight loss drugs](#).
- The prescriber must document the member's active participation in any type of lifestyle modification activity (working with a coach, tracking food and exercising) for a minimum duration of six months before the prior authorization request. The prescriber will no longer be able to attest to a member's participation. The prescriber must submit documentation, or the request will be denied. Please reference the March provider alert, [Explanation of lifestyle modification for weight loss drugs](#).
- The provider must document that the member is enrolled and participating in one of three weight management programs offered through [Teladoc® Health Condition Management Solutions](#): diabetes prevention, hypertension or weight management. To fulfill this requirement, members must complete at least one session with their Teladoc Health coach and develop an action plan. Members must share (by [downloading or printing](#)) their Teladoc Health summary report with their prescriber as supporting documentation. The prescriber must submit the member's Teladoc Health summary report with the prior authorization request. These Teladoc Health programs are free to eligible members and offer easy-to-use tools and support. The prescriber must submit documentation of the member's active participation, or the request will be denied.

Members can enroll in Teladoc Health Condition Management Solutions by calling 1-800-835-2362, or [enroll online](#) with registration code BLUECROSSMI-START.

In addition to the requirements above, Saxenda, Wegovy, and Zepbound:

- Can't be used in combination with other weight loss products or other products that contain GLP-1 agonists
- Aren't covered for members with Type 2 diabetes

For more information on how to submit a prior authorization electronically:

1. Go to ereferrals.bcbsm.com.
2. Select *Blue Cross* for PPO members or *BCN* for HMO members.
3. Click *Pharmacy Benefit Drugs* in the left navigation.
4. See the section, "How to submit an electronic prior authorization, or ePA, request."

What you need to do

If you have Blue Cross or BCN commercial members with a current prior authorization for Saxenda, Wegovy or Zepbound, ask if the member is affected by this change. The member will know they're affected if they receive a letter from Blue Cross. The member can also check their Blue Cross member app or call the customer service number on their ID card.

If the member is affected, you'll need to submit a new prior authorization request following the new requirements for dates of service beginning Aug. 1, 2024. Based on the new requirements, the member may require a new prescription. If the new coverage requirements are not met, or the documentation noted above is not included in the prior authorization request, these Blue Cross and BCN members will no longer qualify for coverage.

We're changing coverage

Beginning Jan. 1, 2025, Blue Cross and BCN will no longer cover any GLP-1 drug for weight loss for fully insured large group commercial members. For group members with a plan renewal date other than Jan. 1, this change will go into effect on the renewal date.

This applies to all GLP-1 weight loss drugs, including Saxenda, Wegovy and Zepbound.

If you keep a member who is affected by this change on a GLP-1 drug for weight loss, that member will be responsible for the full cost of the drug.

We'll update our drug criteria documents

The following documents will be updated to reflect these changes as they occur:

- [Blue Cross PPO and BCN HMO prior authorization and step therapy coverage criteria](#)
- [Blue Cross PPO and BCN HMO prior authorization and step therapy coverage criteria for the Preferred Drug List](#)

Why Blue Cross and BCN are making these changes

We're making these changes in part because research has shown that a person's chance of success in losing weight and maintaining that weight loss is greatly improved when medication is paired with lifestyle changes, including diet and exercise.^{1,2} This is why we're requiring that members on Saxenda, Wegovy or Zepbound participate in the weight management program through Teladoc Health.

In addition, prescription medications need to be effective as well as safe. Data published by the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association in May 2024 shows that most patients aren't staying on weight loss GLP-1 drugs long enough to see a benefit.³ Due to the high cost of these drugs and supply considerations, we want to ensure they are used for the most appropriate patients who can achieve clinical benefit. Additional research is needed to understand whether GLP-1 interventions lead to lower medical costs in the long term.

Questions?

If you have questions, call the Pharmacy Services Clinical Help Desk at 1-800-437-3803.

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¹Jensen, S. B., Blond, M. B., Sandsdal, R. M., Olsen, L. M., Juhl, C. R., Lundgren, J. R., Janus, C., Stallknecht, B. M., Holst, J. J., Madsbad, S., & Torekov, S. S. (2024). [Healthy weight loss maintenance with exercise, GLP-1 receptor agonist, or both combined followed by one year without treatment: A post-treatment analysis of a randomised placebo-controlled trial.](#) *eClinicalMedicine*, 69, 102475. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2024.102475>

²Dalle Grave, R. (2024). [The benefit of healthy lifestyle in the era of new medications to treat obesity.](#) *Diabetes, Metabolic Syndrome and Obesity*, 17, 227-230. <https://doi.org/10.2147/dmso.s447582>

³Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, Blue Health Intelligence Issue Brief (May 2024). [Real-World Trends in GLP-1 Treatment Persistence and Prescribing for Weight Management.](#) Retrieved from https://www.bcbs.com/sites/default/files/BHI_Issue_Brief_GLP1_Trends.pdf

Teladoc Health is an independent company that provides virtual care solutions on behalf of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and Blue Care Network.