April 22nd, 2020

Honorable Chairman Jim Wood
Assembly Committee on Health
California State Legislature
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support AB 2144- Health care coverage: step therapy

Dear Chairman Wood,

The National Psoriasis Foundation (NPF) is a non-profit organization with a mission to drive efforts to cure psoriatic disease and improve the lives of those affected. The NPF is the leading patient advocacy group for more than 8.3 million Americans and the more than 1.3 million California residents living with psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis. I write to you today to express our support for AB 2144 and its timely need in our current public health emergency (PHE).

Each day, our patients face the reality of barriers to health care through utilization management practices that impact treatment, health, and well-being. When these policies interfere with the patient-physician relationship, they can result in delayed treatment, increased disease activity, loss of function, and potentially irreversible disease progression. During a PHE these barriers are exacerbated.

Step therapy, also known as ‘fail first’, directs patients to medications that are preferred on the formulary, requiring patients to ‘fail first’, often multiple times, on certain medications before they receive insurance coverage for the treatment originally prescribed by their provider. Due to the heterogeneous nature of psoriatic disease, patients need access to a broad range of treatment choices, making a one-size-fits-all approach harmful for patients.

Step therapy protocols often significantly delay patients’ access to medications prescribed by their doctors, even for treatments that have already proven effective for the patient. Such impediments to care are challenging under normal circumstances and are exponentially more daunting during a public health crisis where our health care system is under an enormous strain. Across the country, patients are unable to see their doctors in person and physicians are being forced to cut staff, particularly administrative staff. In a pandemic where there is limited staff, resources, and time, providers and patients simply do not have the bandwidth to go through the challenging process of obtaining exceptions to step therapy protocols. Without proper treatment, patients with chronic conditions like psoriatic disease may experience otherwise preventable health events, resulting in more doctor visits or hospitalization. Californian’s cannot afford to be put at risk of hospitalization right now, especially when hospitals are low on resources and those with chronic conditions are already at higher risk of contradicting COVID-19.

Assembly Bill 2144 aims to restore the patient-physician relationship by requiring a clear and accessible exceptions process for patients and their providers. Assembly Bill 2144 does not prohibit insurers from using utilization management tools or require insurers to cover any specific medication. To ensure patients have timely access to the most appropriate treatments as determined by their health care provider, AB 2144 creates safeguards for all patients by guaranteeing access to a clear and expeditious process.
The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on existing issues with our current healthcare system. Throughout this PHE, we have seen access to necessary medications in question and unnecessary hurdles to care creating barriers for patients. So much so, that the Department of Insurance and the Department of Managed Health Care have put guardrails in place for treatments, such as lessening the burden of utilization management protocols. Accordingly, AB 2144 is necessary now more than ever and will make the DOI guardrails permeant.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions, please reach out at bduffy-goche@psoriasis.org.

Sincerely,

Brittany Duffy-Goche
State Government Relations Manager