



January 28, 2025

The Honorable Judy Lee
Chair, Senate Human Services Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

The Honorable Kent Weston
Vice Chair, Senate Human Services Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

RE: Bill SB 2249 – Reform to Step Therapy Protocols

Dear Members of the Senate Human Services Committee,

On behalf of the Alliance for Gout Awareness, I am writing in support of Bill SB 2249. This legislation is necessary to ensure that patients living with gout in North Dakota have timely access to provider-prescribed treatments by providing clear guidelines around step therapy protocols.

About Gout and The Alliance for Gout Awareness

Gout is a chronic form of inflammatory arthritis affecting more than 12 million Americans.¹ Gout occurs due to a buildup of uric acid in the body. When excess uric acid builds up in the body, it deposits around joints and can lead to swollen joints and sudden, intensely painful attacks that can be debilitating.² It is a chronic medical condition that, left untreated, can result in more frequent and painful attacks and joint damage.³ It can also increase patients’ risk for other severe medical conditions such as kidney disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and stroke.⁴

The [Alliance for Gout Awareness](#) (AGA) aims to reduce stigma and empower patients by improving public understanding of gout. AGA collaborates with our network of member organizations to heighten public awareness, address common misconceptions, and encourage patients to acknowledge the disease’s impact and seek appropriate treatment.

Step Therapy Protocols Can Harm Patients Living with Gout

Insurers use a variety of approaches to manage their costs—often at the expense of gout patients’ health.⁵ Step therapy, also known as “fail first,” is an approach that requires patients to try and fail insurer-preferred medications before they can access the medication(s) prescribed by their provider. The insurer-preferred medications are often older therapies that are less expensive to the insurer. However, these may not offer relief to patients, and delays in accessing provider-prescribed medications may lead to more frequent and painful gout attacks, increased trips to the ER/Urgent Care, and increased health risks.⁶ According to a 2022 survey conducted by the Alliance

¹ [Trends in Prevalence of Gout Among US Asian Adults, 2011-2018 | Rheumatology | JAMA Network Open | JAMA Network](#)

² Alliance for Gout Awareness. What is Gout? <https://goutalliance.org/what-is-gout/>

³ Alliance for Gout Awareness. When Gout Goes Untreated. <https://goutalliance.org/resources/when-gout-goes-untreated/>

⁴ Arthritis Foundation Comorbid Conditions and Gout. <https://www.arthritis.org/health-wellness/about-arthritis/related-conditions/other-diseases/five-conditions-linked-with-gout>

⁵ Alliance for Gout Awareness. A Roadmap to Better Care for Gout. <https://goutalliance.org/resources/a-roadmap-to-better-care-for-gout/>

⁶ Alliance for Gout Awareness. Step Therapy & Gout. <https://goutalliance.org/resources/step-therapy-gout/>

for Patient Access, 98% of physicians identify step therapy as a significant barrier to proper care for their patients.⁷

While gout is not curable, it is treatable when approached from a holistic view of managing acute gout flares and addressing the root cause of chronic gout. Gout is a systemic disease that requires providers to utilize therapies to relieve flare symptoms and decrease the amount of uric acid in the blood. In addition to the severe physical pain associated with gout attacks, the condition can affect a patient's social, emotional, and mental health and well-being, which can threaten the overall quality of life for patients.⁸

Treatment decisions should be determined by the patient and provider as opposed to by an insurer's step therapy protocols that can delay appropriate access to treatment and inhibit a patient-centered approach to care.

Bill SB2249 Supports Patient Access to Provider-Prescribed Treatment in North Dakota

Bill SB 2249 would support patient-centered gout care by reforming step therapy practices. The legislation requires insurers to enact transparent and efficient processes for patients and providers to request step therapy protocol exemptions. This legislation does not prohibit step therapy protocols or limit the number of steps required by an insurer but defines circumstances that would allow for exemptions. With these processes in place, patients living with gout in North Dakota would be able to better access treatment prescribed by their provider in a timely and appropriate manner. As a result, patients are able to proactively and effectively manage their condition.

On behalf of the Alliance for Gout Awareness, thank you for your leadership on this important issue and for supporting patient access. If we can provide further details or answer any questions, please contact Kayla Roddey at kroddey@allianceforpatientaccess.org.

Sincerely,

The Alliance for Gout Awareness

Cc:

Senator David Clemens

Senator Kathy Hogan

Senator Kristin Roers

Senator Desiree Van Oosting

⁷ Alliance for Patient Access. Physician Burnout & Utilization Management Survey https://allianceforpatientaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/AfPA_Physician-Burnout-Utilization-Management_Tri-fold_DIGITAL_November-2024.pdf

⁸ Alliance for Gout Awareness. The Journey Toward Disease Management: A National Survey of Gout Patients. <https://goutalliance.org/resources/the-journey-toward-disease-management-a-national-survey-of-gout-patients/>