August 20, 2018

The Honorable Karen E. Spilka
Senate President
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street, Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable James T. Welch
Chair Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
State House
24 Beacon Street, Room 413-B
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Senators Spilka and Welch,

I am writing on behalf of the National Diabetes Volunteer Leadership Council (NDVLC) to request your support for H.4825, extending authorization for certain prescription drug discount vouchers in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Co-pay cards and prescription discount plans are by no means a perfect solution to rising pharmaceutical costs; however, for many people with diabetes they are a lifeline – significantly reducing out-of-pocket costs for insulin, as well as other medicines and supplies needed to effectively manage diabetes.

We appreciate Governor Baker’s support on the issue but respectfully believe that extending the sunset from 2019 to 2021 is warranted. This longer time frame will give patients, health care providers and voucher sponsors needed certainty – leading to lower, more predictable out-of-pocket costs for people with diabetes who rely on co-pay cards or similar discounts to afford insulin. Many health plans change their preferred insulins mid-year. For people with diabetes, knowing outside help is available may mean the difference between consistent insulin treatment and repeated non-medical switching that can undermine blood glucose management.

Affordable insulin access is NDVLC’s highest advocacy priority. We believe all health plans should cover insulin as a preventive medicine with no cost-sharing; it is an essential, lifesaving product for which there is no low-cost, generic alternative. Unfortunately too many people with diabetes are exposed to high insulin costs either because they are uninsured or underinsured, despite the Commonwealth’s progress improving access to affordable health coverage. NDVLC’s national study found 57 percent of people with diabetes using insulin are exposed to unexpected, high pharmacy costs at some point in the year – most often in the deductible phase of a high-deductible health plan.¹
Insulin manufacturers and pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) negotiate steep rebates for formulary placement – exceeding 60 percent of list price according to some estimates.ii,iii Retail insulin prices and the list prices on which they are based continue to rise, leading many uninsured people with diabetes to turn to prescription discounts. Underinsured people with diabetes may be in health plans that do not extend negotiated discounts at the pharmacy – once again leaving people with diabetes on the hook for insulin retail prices unless they can find co-pay cards or discounts to close the gap.

NDVLC has partnered with JDRF to educate employers, health plan sponsors and employee benefit consultants about the importance of reducing insulin costs so employees and their dependents can manage their diabetes. We recognize these changes take time, however, and address just part of the insulin affordability problem.

Co-pay cards and discount plans do not fix our nation’s broken system of pharmaceutical coverage and reimbursement – but they do ease some of the immediate pain the system causes people with chronic conditions like diabetes. Massachusetts consumers should have access to any and all commercially available means to reduce their out-of-pocket costs for insulin and other medicines.

On behalf of the NDVLC, I urge you to support H.4825. Please reach out to Erika B. Emerson, Policy and Advocacy Director, at 303-506-6106 or ebemerson@ndvlc.org if we can answer any questions or provide further information.

Sincerely,

Lawrence T. Smith
President, National Diabetes Volunteer Leadership Council
Past Chair of the Board, American Diabetes Association

cc: National Diabetes Volunteer Leadership Council Board of Directors

NDVLC is comprised of individuals who have served in a volunteer leadership position of a national diabetes organization. We actively engage in diabetes advocacy at the local, state and national levels to improve safety and quality of life for all children, adults and their families who are living with diabetes. For more information about NDVLC and the Access to Insulin initiative, please visit ndvlc.org.

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iii QuintilesIMS. http://nationalacademies.org/hmd/~/media/Files/Activity%20Files/HealthServices/Affordable%20Drug%20Therapies/ADS%20Presentation%20II/Tenaglia.pdf