National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society

February 22, 2017

Chairwoman Laurie Monnes Anderson, and Members of the Senate Health Care and Human Services Committee
Re: SB 272 Proponent

Chair Monnes Anderson and Committee Members:

I am writing on behalf of the National Multiple Sclerosis Society in support of SB 272. The National MS Society believes that passage of SB 272 would have a positive and meaningful impact on many Oregonians living with and affected by multiple sclerosis. We urge your support for this key legislation, which would make significant improvements to prescription drug coverage by making details about coverage and costs more transparent, as well as providing continuity of coverage, in the State of Oregon.

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an unpredictable, often disabling disease of the central nervous system. MS interrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and body. Symptoms range from numbness and tingling to blindness and paralysis. The progress, severity and specific symptoms of MS in any one person cannot yet be predicted. There is currently no cure for MS and since the disease is not fatal, a person can live with the disease their entire life.

Research shows that early and ongoing treatment with a disease-modifying therapy (DMT) is the best way to slow the course of disease and disability from relapsing forms of MS, and protect the brain from damage due to MS lesions. MS can also be accompanied by a variety of life altering symptoms such as bladder problems, vision problems, and issues with gait, spasticity, and extreme fatigue. It can take years for a person living with a chronic health condition like MS to find the most effective course of treatment for their set of symptoms. Any change to a treatment plan that is not made for medical reasons must be understood as potentially harmful, and can put the patient's health at risk. In addition, changing a person's medication can sometimes cause adverse reactions or side effects.

We often hear complaints from people living with MS about changes to their drug benefits made by their insurer after they have enrolled and the plan year has begun. These changes can be made without notification to the patient or their healthcare provider, meaning some only learn of them from the pharmacy. Any increase in co-pays or cost-sharing can make a person's medication unaffordable and out-of-reach. MS disease-modifying therapies all cost upwards of $66,000 per year, so medication coverage is essential. Forcing patients to make tough financial decisions, or skip doses or abandon treatment altogether, can result in serious, even permanent negative consequences to their health.

People with MS consistently report that they face serious challenges accessing the detailed information about prescription drug benefits and out-of-pocket costs that they need to make informed healthcare decisions and maintain their financial security. Having access to complete, up-to-date information about a health plan's coverage can be critical for the health of people living with MS.

In terms of transparency reforms, SB 272 would require insurers to post drug formularies electronically, and ensure that they are searchable by the name of each drug. The bill would require that plans disclose any cost-sharing that would be paid by the enrollee, for each drug on the formulary. It also requires that plans publicly post any step therapy, prior authorization, or other utilization review protocol, as it applies to each drug on the formulary.

In terms of providing continuity of coverage, SB 272 would ensure that existing enrollees to a health plan have continued access to their prescription drugs. It would prevent health insurers from making mid-year changes to prescription drug formularies, such as removing a drug, unless the FDA has issued a warning. It would also prohibit an insurer from increasing the deductible, copayment, coinsurance, or any other cost-sharing for a drug. Finally, insurers would be unable to impose new utilization controls on a drug, including new prior authorization or step therapy requirements.

In closing, I would like to respectfully urge the committee to support SB 272. It is vital that people living with MS in Oregon can have access to comprehensive information about their health plan, and the prescription drug coverage they need. Please let me know if you have any questions about our position; I can be reached at steffany.stern@nmss.org.

Sincerely,

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