Your prescription benefits

Changes to your employees’ prescription coverage may help them save money.

Making the most of your health care dollar

At Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, we’re dedicated to helping our members make the most of their health care dollars and helping to ensure that they have access to the care they need. In fact, we’re always looking for ways to make health care more affordable for everyone. That’s why we are changing how we cover some types of prescription medications.

What does this mean to you? When your group renews with us, we’ll no longer cover certain brand-name prescription drugs and continue to cover less costly, clinically-equivalent alternative drugs.

The first therapeutic class of drugs impacted by this change is proton pump inhibitors (PPIs). PPIs are used to treat gastrointestinal conditions like heartburn, acid reflux and peptic ulcers. The brand name PPIs Prevacid and Protonix will continue to be covered and Aciphex®, Nexium®, Prilosec® 40mg and Zegerid® won’t be covered after your renewal. This change doesn’t affect groups covered by our consumer-driven health products, including our Lumenos® products.

Taking a cost-saving approach to prescription medications

Prescription medications are expensive and their cost continues to rise. To help make sure you can continue offering comprehensive pharmacy coverage to your employees, we’re implementing certain cost-saving strategies. One strategy: Cover lower-cost medications when they are clinically equivalent to higher cost medications. By covering the medications that offer a better value, your employees may be able to lower their out-of-pocket costs too.

Using research to pinpoint cost-effective options

We work with an independent group of pharmacists and doctors who continually review the latest drug research. They identify lower-cost, effective solutions for our members’ medication needs. Then, they make recommendations based on their findings. For instance, if research shows that several drugs in the same class produce the same clinical effect, they may recommend that we cover the lower-cost options as part of our efforts to help reduce the cost of health care.

Brand-name prescription drugs in the PPI category are becoming more and more expensive. However, the latest research — which includes findings from The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs and several nationally known studies on drugs that treat these types of stomach problems — found that all of the medications out there are just as effective as one another.

Here’s what they all agreed on:

- The brand-name drugs in this category are equally effective.
- The generic alternative* is just as effective as the brand-name drugs.
- The over-the-counter drug in this category is just as effective as the brand-name and generic drugs available only by prescription.

Keeping your employees in the loop

We’ll continue to look at other categories of drugs to help you and your employees save money. This means, at one point or another, you may have an employee who will be affected by a prescription coverage change. To help make any change easier for your employees, we regularly send letters to those who have used one of the affected prescription drugs in the past nine months and will provide options for alternative covered drugs for them to discuss with their physician.

For more details about this change to your plan, please see your new Certificate of Coverage or contact your Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield sales representative.

* Please refer to your group benefits to see if your plan covers the generic PPI, Omeprazole.

1  US Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Comparative Effectiveness of Management Strategies for Gastroesophageal Reflux Disease, Comparative Effectiveness Review, Number 1, December 2005.
2  Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs: Drugs to Treat Heartburn, Ulcers, and Stomach Acid Reflux: The Proton Pump Inhibitors, January 2007.
3  Philip Miner M.D., Philip O. Katz M.D., Yusong Chen Ph.D., Mark Sostek M.D., Gastric cid control with esomeprazole, lanoprazole, omeprazole, pantoprazole, and rabeprazole: a five-way crossover study, American Journal of Gastroenterology, Dec 2003 98:2616-20
4  Oregon Health Resources Commission, Proton Pump Inhibitors, Subcommittee Report, Update #4, July 2006.