

Clinical Policy: Step Therapy

Reference Number: CP.CPA.83

Effective Date: 09.01.18

Last Review Date: 05.26

Line of Business: Commercial*

[Revision Log](#)

See [Important Reminder](#) at the end of this policy for important regulatory and legal information.

Description

This policy provides a list of drugs that require step therapy.

**This step therapy policy does not apply to drugs that are not on the Commercial formulary. For non-formulary drugs, refer to the formulary exception policy, CP.CPA.190 Formulary Exceptions.*

FDA Approved Indication(s)

Various

Policy/Criteria

Provider must submit documentation (such as office chart notes, lab results, or other clinical information) supporting that member has met all approval criteria.

It is the policy of health plans affiliated with Centene Corporation[®] that the following drugs are **medically necessary** when the following criteria are met:

I. Initial Approval Criteria

A. Step Therapy:

1. Drugs listed in the table below may be approved for 12 months or duration of request, whichever is less, for members who have had a previous trial of or who have contraindications to required step-through agents, when the request does not exceed the maximum indicated dose and stated quantity limit.

Drug Name	Required Step-Through Agents	Maximum Dose (Quantity Limit)
aliskiren/HCTZ (Tekturna HCT [®])	Generic or preferred ARB (e.g., olmesartan, olmesartan/hctz, irbesartan, losartan, candesartan, telmisartan, valsartan)	Tekturna HCT: 300/25 mg/day
Astagraf XL [®] (tacrolimus SR)	Generic tacrolimus	0.2 mg/kg/day
Aptiom [®] (eslicarbazepine)	Carbamazepine or oxcarbazepine	1,600 mg daily (2 tablets/day)
Bepreve [®] (bepotastine)	Generic ophthalmic olopatadine, and either azelastine or epinastine	2 drops/eye/day (0.34 mL/day)

Drug Name	Required Step-Through Agents	Maximum Dose (Quantity Limit)
calcipotriene-betamethasone ointment (Taclonex [®])	Generic topical steroid and either topical calcitriol or calcipotriene cream	100 g/week (2 g/day)
calcipotriene-betamethasone suspension (Taclonex [®])	Generic topical clobetasol and topical fluocinolone	100 g/week (2 g/day)
Celecoxib (Celebrex [®])* <i>*Applies to Oregon Commercial ONLY; for California Commercial refer to CP.PMN.122</i>	One of the following (a, b, c, or d), unless member is > 65 years old, has prior gastrointestinal bleed, or active peptic ulcer disease (not gastroesophageal reflux disease [GERD]): a) Meloxicam; b) Generic NSAID; c) Current use of a corticosteroid; d) Current use of an anticoagulant or antiplatelet (e.g., aspirin, warfarin, low molecular weight heparin, direct thrombin inhibitors, factor Xa inhibitors, clopidogrel).	800 mg /day (2 capsules)
clonidine extended release (Nexiclon [™] XR)	Generic clonidine hydrochloride immediate release	0.52 mg/day
Fluoxetine (Prozac [®])	Two generic antidepressants	80 mg/day
flurandrenolide lotion 0.05% (Cordran [®])	Generic topical corticosteroid alternatives	3 applications topically per day
desoximetasone spray 0.25% (Topicort [®])	Generic desoximetasone 0.25% ointment or cream	Not applicable
doxycycline monohydrate	Doxycycline Hyclate	Not applicable
ethacrynic acid (Edecrin [®])	Generic bumetanide, furosemide, or torsemide	400 mg/day
Fetzima [®] (levomilnacipran)	Two generic antidepressants	120 mg/day (20 mg: 2 tablets/day; Other strengths:1 tablet/day)
bupropion hydrochloride ER (Forfivo XL [®])	Two generic antidepressants	450 mg/day (1 tablet/day)
Lastacaft [®] (alcaftadine ophthalmic solution 0.25%)	Both of the following (a and b): a) Patanol or Pataday	(1 drop/eye/day) 1 bottle/month

Drug Name	Required Step-Through Agents	Maximum Dose (Quantity Limit)
	b) Azelastine or Epinastine	
modafinil (Provigil [®])	armodafinil (Nuvigil [®])	200 mg/day for shift work disorder; 400 mg for all other indications
Oxtellar XR [®] (oxcarbazepine SR 150 mg, 300 mg, 600 mg)	Generic Trileptal	2,400 mg/day
pregabalin immediate-release (Lyrica [®])	Both of the following (a and b): a) gabapentin b) One of the following: antidepressant, anticonvulsant, buspirone, or cyclobenzaprine	Varies
Retin-A Micro [®] (tretinoin microsphere gel)	Generic tretinoin product	Once daily application
Trintellix [®] (vortioxetine)	Two generic antidepressants	20 mg/day
Ubrelvy [™] (ubrogepant)* <i>*Ubrelvy should not be prescribed concurrently with other CGRP inhibitors (e.g., Aimovig[™], Ajovy[™], Emgality[™], Nurtec[®] ODT, Qulipta[™], Vyepti[™])</i>	<u>For California Exchange Plans only:</u> One 5HT _{1B/1D} -agonist migraine medication (e.g., sumatriptan, rizatriptan, zolmitriptan) <u>For California & Oregon Commercial formularies:</u> Two 5HT _{1B/1D} -agonist migraine medications (e.g., sumatriptan, rizatriptan, zolmitriptan)	Varies
Xhance [®] (fluticasone propionate)*	One formulary intranasal steroid (e.g., fluticasone propionate, mometasone, budesonide, triamcinolone)	Varies

Agents are listed as Brand name[®] (generic) when the drug is available by brand name only and generic (Brand name[®]) when the drug is available by both brand and generic.

Approval duration: 12 months or duration of request, whichever is less

II. Continued Therapy

A. Step Therapy (must meet all):

1. Member meets one of the following (a or b):

- a. Currently receiving medication via Centene benefit or member has previously met initial approval criteria;
 - b. Member is currently receiving medication and is enrolled in a state and product with continuity of care regulations (*refer to state specific addendums for CC.PHARM.03A and CC.PHARM.03B*);
2. If request is for a dose increase, new dose does not exceed the FDA-approved maximum recommended dose and quantity limit as stated in the initial approval criteria for the relevant drug.

Approval duration: 12 months or duration of request, whichever is less

III. Appendices/General Information

Appendix A: Abbreviation/Acronym Key

ARB angiotensin receptor blocker	IR: immediate-release
CR: controlled-release	NSAID: non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug
ER: extended-release	SR: sustained-release
FDA: Food and Drug Administration	XL: extended-release
HCTZ: hydrochlorothiazide	

Appendix B: Therapeutic Alternatives

Refer to the required step-through drugs above in Section I.

Appendix C: Contraindications/Boxed Warnings

Refer to the package inserts for each of the drugs requiring step therapy.

IV. Dosage and Administration

Refer to the step therapy table in Section I.

V. Product Availability

Drug Name	Availability
alcaftadine (Lastacaft)	Ophthalmic solution: 0.25%
aliskiren/HCTZ (Tekturna HCT)	Tablets: 150/12.5, 150/25, 300/12.5, 300/25 mg
bepotastine (Bepreve)	Ophthalmic solutions, 1.5%: 5 mL, 10 mL
bupropion hydrochloride ER (Forfivo XL)	Tablets, extended release: 450 mg
calcipotriene-betamethasone (Taclonex)	Topical ointments, 0.005%/0.064%: 60 g, 100 g Topical suspensions, 0.005%/0.064%: 60 g, 100 g
celecoxib (Celebrex)	Capsules: 50 mg, 100 mg, 200 mg, and 400 mg
Cordran (flurandrenolide lotion, ointment)	Lotion 0.05%: 120 mL Ointment 0.05%: 60 g
clonidine extended release (Nexiclon XR)	Extended-Release Tablets: 0.17, 0.26 mg clonidine base
desoximetasone (Topicort)	Topical spray, solution, 0.25%: 100 mL
doxycycline monohydrate	Capsules, tablets: 50 mg, 75 mg, 100 mg, 150 mg
ethacrynic acid (Edecrin)	Tablet: 25 mg
fluoxetine (Prozac)	Tablet: 10 mg, 20 mg, 40 mg, 60 mg

Drug Name	Availability
levomilnacipran (Fetzima)	Capsules, extended release: 20 mg, 40 mg, 80 mg, 120 mg Capsules, extended release therapy pack: 20 mg/40 mg
modafinil (Provigil)	Tablets: 100 mg, 200 mg
olmesartan/amlodipine (Azor)	Tablets: 5/20, 10/20, 5/40, 10/40 mg
olmesartan/amlodipine/HCTZ (Tribenzor)	Tablets: 20/5/12.5, 40/5/12.5, 40/5/25, 40/10/12.5, 40/10/25 mg
pregabalin immediate-release (Lyrica)	Capsules: 25 mg, 50 mg, 75 mg, 100 mg, 150 mg, 200 mg, 225 mg, 300 mg Oral solution: 20 mg/mL
Retin-A Micro (tretinoin microsphere gel)	Gel (20 g, 45 g tube): 0.1%, 0.04% Gel (50 g pump): 0.06%, 0.08%
tacrolimus SR (Astagraf XL)	Capsules, extended release: 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 5 mg
Ubrelvy (ubrogepant)	Tablets (package size 10, 16, 30): 50 mg, 100 mg
vortioxetine (Trintellix)	Tablets: 5 mg, 10 mg, 20 mg
Xhance (fluticasone propionate)	Nasal spray: 93 mcg of fluticasone propionate in each 106-mg spray with 120 metered sprays per device

VI. References

1. Clinical Pharmacology [database online]. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier. 2026. Available at: <https://www.clinicalkey.com/pharmacology/>. Accessed February 23, 2026.
2. American Psychiatric Association: Practice guideline for the treatment of patients with major depressive disorder 3rd edition. Am J Psychiatry 2010;167(suppl):1-152.
3. Qaseem A, Owens DK, Etcheandia-Ikobaltzeta I, et al. Nonpharmacologic and Pharmacologic Treatments of Adults in the Acute Phase of Major Depressive Disorder: A Living Clinical Guideline From the American College of Physicians. Ann Intern Med. 2023 Feb; 176(2): 239-252.
4. Kanner AM, Ashman E, Gloss D, et al. Practice guideline update summary: Efficacy and tolerability of the new antiepileptic drugs I: Treatment of new-onset epilepsy. Report of the Guideline Development, Dissemination, and Implementation Subcommittee of the American Academy of Neurology and the American Epilepsy Society. Neurology. July 10, 2018; 91(2):74-81.
5. Kanner AM, Ashman E, Gloss D, et al. Practice guideline update summary: Efficacy and tolerability of the new antiepileptic drugs II: Treatment resistant epilepsy. Report of the Guideline Development, Dissemination, and Implementation Subcommittee of the American Academy of Neurology and the American Epilepsy Society. Epilepsy Curr. Jul-Aug 2018;18(4):269-78.

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Date	P&T Approval Date
2Q 2022 annual review: added the following to align with formulary and clinical pharmacy messaging: Androderm, Cordran, doxycycline monohydrate, fluoxetine, Retin-A Micro; references reviewed and updated.	02.23.22	05.22

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Date	P&T Approval Date
Per August SDC and prior clinical guidance, added Ubrelvy requiring step through two 5HT _{1B/1D} -agonist migraine medications (e.g., sumatriptan, rizatriptan, zolmitriptan); removed Viibryd from policy. Per September SDC removed Androderm from policy.	09.26.22	11.22
2Q 2023 annual review: removed fluoxetine, Envarsus XR, desvenlafaxine, Tekturna, and Cimduo as EST is not required; for risedronate referenced brand name Atelvia as Actonel does not require step therapy, deleted dosing other than 35 mg strength; template changes applied to continued therapy; references reviewed and updated.	02.02.23	05.23
Per SDC, added Xhance to policy requiring one intranasal steroid; added clarification that this applies to California Commercial formularies only, for Oregon formularies, refer to CP.PMN.95.	05.04.23	
Per May SDC, added celecoxib to policy requiring step through meloxicam or generic NSAID or current use of corticosteroid or anticoagulant. For Cordran, corrected max dosing per label.	05.24.23	08.23
For Ubrelvy, added clarification that Ubrelvy should not be prescribed concurrently with other CGRP inhibitors.	08.28.23	
For Celebrex added clarification that step therapy criteria applies to Oregon Commercial only, for California Commercial refer to CP.PMN.122.	09.18.23	
Per September SDC and prior clinical guidance, added Aptiom to policy requiring step through carbamazepine or oxcarbazepine.	09.21.23	12.23
2Q 2024 annual review: removed Atelvia as it is non-formulary; for Taclonex clarified step through drugs are topical formulations; references reviewed and updated. Per March SDC, revised Ubrelvy step-through agent requirements for California Commercial Exchange Plans from two to one 5HT _{1B/1D} -agonist medication (all other commercial formularies retain requirements for two 5HT _{1B/1D} -agonist medications).	03.12.24	05.24
Added reference to the American Psychiatric Association, American College of Physicians, and American Academy of Neurology clinical practice guidelines per compliance request. For Ubrelvy, clarified that “California Commercial Exchange Plans” refers to “California Exchange Plans.”	07.16.24	
For Xhance, removed the following clarification: “Applies to California Commercial formularies only. For Oregon formularies, refer to CP.PMN.95.”	08.05.24	
2Q 2025 annual review: modified Applenin required step through agents from two generic antidepressants to Bupropion XL (generic Wellbutrin XL, generic Forfivo XL); added clonidine extended release (Nexiclon XR) with required step-through generic clonidine hydrochloride immediate release; for Xhance added triamcinolone	01.15.25	05.25

Reviews, Revisions, and Approvals	Date	P&T Approval Date
as an example of formulary intranasal steroids; removed reference to Zyflo CR as brand product has been discontinued; references reviewed and updated.		
For Trintellix, removed quantity limit per plan request to allow for dose titration.	07.07.25	
Per September SDC, added pregabalin immediate-release (Lyrica) requiring step through gabapentin and one of the following: antidepressant, anticonvulsant, buspirone, or cyclobenzaprine.	09.23.25	12.25
2Q 2026 annual review: added fluoxetine requiring step through two generic antidepressants; removed the following as step therapy is not required: Aplenzin, flurandrenolide ointment 0.05%, Azor, Tribenzor, Pataday Extra Strength, zileuton, Zyflo; references reviewed and updated.	01.14.26	05.26

Important Reminder

This clinical policy has been developed by appropriately experienced and licensed health care professionals based on a review and consideration of currently available generally accepted standards of medical practice; peer-reviewed medical literature; government agency/program approval status; evidence-based guidelines and positions of leading national health professional organizations; views of physicians practicing in relevant clinical areas affected by this clinical policy; and other available clinical information. The Health Plan makes no representations and accepts no liability with respect to the content of any external information used or relied upon in developing this clinical policy. This clinical policy is consistent with standards of medical practice current at the time that this clinical policy was approved. “Health Plan” means a health plan that has adopted this clinical policy and that is operated or administered, in whole or in part, by Centene Management Company, LLC, or any of such health plan’s affiliates, as applicable.

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