

## Support H.R.2630/S. 652 - the Safe Step Act

**Issue:** Remove unreasonable barriers to patient care and reduce administrative burden for physicians by reforming step therapy protocols.

### Why Action is Needed

Administrative requirements can impede patients from receiving their prescribed medications, delaying and potentially hindering patient care. They also force physicians to divert time and focus away from patient care and can prevent patients from receiving timely and appropriate treatment. A 2022 [survey](#) of more than 500 doctors from group practices found that 89 percent believe that regulatory burdens increased in the past year, and 82 percent responded that the prior authorization process in particular is very or extremely burdensome.

Pharmacy Benefit Managers (PBMs) and group health insurers have developed a series of price management tools to curb the cost of prescription drugs. Among these, step therapy policies, commonly called “[fail-first](#)” policies, require patients to be initiated on [lower-priced medications](#) before being approved for originally prescribed medications.

Patients and their physicians would benefit greatly from insurers being required to have a clear and transparent process for when either party requests an exception to a step therapy protocol. The Safe Step Act provides five exceptions to fail first protocols and requires that a group health plan grant an exemption if an application clearly demonstrates any of the following situations:

- The patient already tried and failed on the required drug.
- The delayed treatment will cause irreversible consequences and negatively affect the patient’s medication.
- The prescription drug to which the health plan is requiring the patient to “fail first” on will cause harm to the patient.
- The required drug will prevent a patient from working or fulfilling activities of daily living.
- The patient is stable on their current medication.

### ACP’s Position

Congress needs to do its part to improve physicians’ ability to provide seamless evidence-based care for their patients without unnecessary administrative delays. ACP released a [position paper](#), that details recommendations for reforming the practice of step therapy and medication switching:

- All step therapy and medication switching policies should aim to minimize care disruption, harm, side effects, and risks to the patient.
- All step therapy and nonmedical drug switching policies should be designed with patients at the center, taking into account unique needs and preferences.
- All step therapy and nonmedical drug switching protocols should be designed with input from physicians and pharmacists; feature transparent, minimally burdensome processes that consider the expertise of a patient’s physician; and include a timely appeals process.

### Call to Action

[Co-sponsor and pass](#) **H.R.2630/S. 652, the Safe Step Act of 2023**, a bipartisan bill that would require group health plans to provide an exception process for any medication step therapy protocol to help ensure that patients can safely and efficiently access treatment.