



March 24, 2026

Legislative Update: Alternatives to Prevent Addiction in the Nation (PAIN) Act

Overview

Last year, the Alternatives to PAIN Act was introduced with bipartisan support in the House of Representatives ([H.R. 1227](#)) and Senate ([S. 475](#)). It aims to ensure appropriate access to non-opioid pain management drugs under Part D of the Medicare program. Of note, this legislation would impose burdensome cost-sharing reductions and utilization management (UM) restrictions on non-opioid pain management medications furnished through the Medicare prescription drug program. H.R. 1227 will be featured in a [March 26 legislative hearing](#) before the Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee, which will mark the most significant action taken on the bill since its introduction 13 months ago.

The Alternatives to PAIN Act is broken into two meaningful sections. Section 2 would require Medicare Part D (PDP and MA-PD) plans to place qualifying non-opioid pain management drugs on their lowest available cost-sharing tier. Such non-opioid pain management drugs would not be subject to a deductible. Under this bill, a “qualifying non-opioid pain management drug” refers to a drug or biological product that:

1. Is indicated by the FDA to reduce post-operative pain or any form of acute pain,
2. Does not act upon opioid receptors,
3. Has no therapeutic equivalent sold or marketed in the United States, that has a wholesale acquisition cost (WAC) for a monthly supply less than or equal to the monthly specialty-tier cost threshold determined by CMS.

Section 2 includes a conforming amendment that would also apply this provision to beneficiaries receiving the [Medicare Low Income Subsidy](#).

Section 3 bans the use of step therapy and prior authorization for qualifying non-opioid pain management drugs under Medicare Part D. PDP and MA-PD sponsors would be prohibited from imposing:

1. A step therapy requirement to utilize opioids prior to receiving the qualifying non-opioid pain management drug, or
2. A prior authorization requirement for a qualifying non-opioid pain management drug.

Section 3 defines step therapy as a UM protocol that “requires use of an alternative, preferred prescription drug or drugs before the plan approves coverage for the non-preferred drug therapy prescribed.” This section defines prior authorization as any requirement “to obtain approval from a prescription drug plan prior to the furnishing of a drug.”

Effective Date:

- For plan years beginning on or after Jan. 1, 2026.

Current Standing:

H.R. 1227 – Referred to House Ways and Means, Energy and Commerce Committees (2/12/2025).
Awaiting [legislative hearing](#) in Energy and Commerce (2/26/2026)

- 81 cosponsors (as of 3/24/26)

S. 475 – Referred to Senate Committee on Finance (2/6/2025)

- 34 cosponsors (as of 3/24/26)

Proponents:

- [Voices for Non-Opioid Choices](#)
 - [119th Congress Sign-On letter](#)
- [Goldfinch Health](#)
- Assorted opioid use disorder advocacy organizations.