

Notification to Alberta pharmacies – June 2021

This communication is intended to advise you on WCB issues related to pharmacy services. Please share this information with your staff.

WCB's opioid analgesics/narcotics policy

As part of an overall approach to effective, appropriate claims management, including the provision of and payment for medical aid, WCB-Alberta ensures that prescribed opioid analgesics (narcotics) support safe and early recovery, return to function and return to work.

WCB case managers make decisions on whether to authorize payments for opioid medications on a claim for chronic, non-malignant pain based on policy requirements. Policy 04-06 states that payment for opioids will not be authorized beyond 12 weeks after an injury or surgery. Information about WCB's opioid policy can be found on our [website](#).

Prescribing or renewing opioids/controlled substances for WCB claimants

New - Please note that although an exemption to subsection 56(1) of the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) permits pharmacists to renew, extend or transfer opioid prescriptions during the Covid-19 pandemic, WCB-Alberta will continue to only approve payment for opioids prescribed by the injured worker's physician.

This is due to the requirement of regular reporting from the prescribing physician documenting current level of function and pain, in order for WCB-Alberta to determine whether to approve further funding. Additionally, on an annual basis the injured worker must pre-designate which specific physician will prescribe and which pharmacy will dispense these opioids. Any deviation from this may put ongoing approval at risk.

*This restriction only applies to opioids, not to any other medication prescribed by a pharmacist for the management of a compensable injury or illness.

Health Care Strategy

New - WCB Coverage for Suboxone buccal films (DINs 02502313, 02502321, 02502348 and 02502356)

Due to the significant risk of under or over-dosing when Suboxone is switched between the sublingual and buccal routes of administration, WCB will not support this formulation of Suboxone.

Health Canada released a warning that the film and tablets are not interchangeable and using the different types can lead to inadvertent over or under-dosing.

Therefore, payments for sublingual prescriptions of Suboxone will only be authorized for the tablet form, which delivers the medication in a more stable and safer format. Authorization for this medication is usually limited to claims where WCB has accepted responsibility for an opioid use disorder.

The pharmacy's role - obtain pre-authorization from WCB

If WCB authorizes payment for prescribed opioid analgesics for the management of chronic, non-malignant pain, it will monitor treatment and will require that there is only one prescriber (generally the injured worker's primary treating physician) and there is only one dispensing pharmacy.

If you are asked by an injured worker to direct bill WCB for opioid medication, it is important to obtain pre-authorization from WCB by calling our contact centre at 1-866-922-9221. Failure to do so may result in the rejection of your billing by WCB if you are not the designated dispensing pharmacy.

For further information:

Contact Luran Chittim at 780-498-3222.

Our contact centre can tell you if the case manager has authorized a specific prescription. Call 780-498-3999 (Edmonton), 403-517-6000 (Calgary) or toll-free within Alberta at 1-866-922-9221.

Thank you for helping us promote worker safety in relation to these drugs.