Summary of Best Practices for Making Prescription Drug Labels Accessible To Patients Who are Blind, Visually Impaired or Elderly

Federal best practices for prescription drug containers have been developed to make it easier for people who are blind, visually impaired or elderly to access label information.

The recommended best practices were developed by a working group of consumer and drug industry advocates convened by the United States Access Board under the Food and Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act (Public Law 112-144, 126 Stat. 993).

The working group stated that people who cannot read printed prescription labels because of visual impairment "all too often take the wrong medication, the wrong amount, at the wrong time and under the wrong instructions." The group also noted that most people who become blind or visually impaired do so after age 60 – a time when many take multiple medications and have physical and cognitive conditions that increase the need for "safe, consistent, reliable and independent access" to drug label information.

Recommendations of the federal working group include:

- Encourage patients to communicate their needs to pharmacists.
- Follow universal patient-centered prescription drug container label standards.
- Make container labels available in audible, braille and large-print formats. Explain the choices and provide the format selected by the patient.
- Ensure that duplicate accessible labels preserve the integrity of the print prescription label.
- Subject accessible prescription labels to the same quality control processes used for print labels to ensure accuracy and patient safety.
- Maintain patient privacy (HIPPA rules) when preparing accessible drug labels.
- Keep a sufficient inventory of supplies to provide accessible labels.
- Provide drugs with an accessible label within the same time frame as would be provided to patients without visual impairments.
- Don't impose an extra fee to cover the cost of providing an accessible drug label.
- Ensure durability of accessible label formats until the prescription expiration date.
- Select a container that best supports the type of accessible label provided.
- Ensure all required information contained on the print prescription drug label is provided in the same sequence on the accessible label.
- Include in accessible labels the information on warning labels added to the container at the pharmacist's discretion.

A variety of methods and technologies exist to enable blind, visually impaired and elderly people to access information on prescription labels, including:

- Hard copy labels printed in large type or braille.
- Digital voice or text-to-speech recorders – "Talking bottles" that use a small electronic device attached to a drug container to read the label information aloud.
- Radio Frequency Identification Device (RFID) tags – Attaching RFID tags to drug containers that enable a dedicated device used by the patient to read the label aloud.
- Smart devices and computers equipped with electronic braille, large text and audio technology to access electronic text.

A brochure listing the best practices was issued in June 2016 by the National Council on Disability. The brochure is available at https://www.ncd.gov/2016/02/26/national-council-on-disability-applauds-latest-industry-action-on-accessible-prescription-drug-labels/.

Additional information about the recommended best practices and a link to the working group's full report is available at https://www.access-board.gov/rx.html.