



National Tay-Sachs &
Allied Diseases Association

Off-Label Drug Use: General Information

Off-label drug use (OLDU) involves prescribing currently available and marketed medications for an indication (for example, for a disease or symptom), or using a dosage or dosage form that have not been approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This differs from investigational drug use, which refers to the use of a medication that is not currently approved by the FDA for any use; investigational medications can generally be accessed only through clinical trials with specific inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The following guidance for individuals living with rare diseases and their healthcare providers (HCPs) is not designed to be comprehensive but instead to address common considerations for OLDU. This document is not intended to provide medical advice; individuals interested in the use of medications off label should discuss this with their HCPs. This information is designed for affected individuals living in the US; the approval status of medications may vary from country to country. Countries outside of the US may have regulations or processes in place to access medications via OLDU as well.

NTSAD does not advocate for or against OLDU of specific drugs for any individuals.

- The FDA approves new medications that have been shown to be safe and effective for specific indications. Once available on the market, the FDA does not control or limit how the medications are prescribed.
- HCPs should prescribe medications only for indications that they believe are in the best interest of the patient. Off-label use is appropriate when supported by credible, peer-reviewed scientific evidence that justifies the drug's use for that particular purpose and when the potential benefits of the drug outweigh the risks. It is essential to recognize that OLDU is frequently considered for a patient population different from the one for which the medication was initially intended. Therefore, careful monitoring for potential novel side effects is necessary and should be discussed and acknowledged by the HCP. In addition, HCPs should educate themselves about OLDU to weigh the risks and benefits and provide the best possible care for their patients. An open discussion between the HCP and the patient/caregiver regarding potential risks and benefits is prudent and should be documented in the patient's medical record. The American Medical Association (AMA) advocates for shared decision-making when considering OLDU.

- Pharmaceutical manufacturers are not allowed to promote off-label use of medications but are allowed to respond to unsolicited questions from HCPs about off-label use.
- Consideration should be given to any peer-reviewed scientific studies available to support the proposed OLDU in the disease of interest. The known side effect profile of the medication should also be considered.
- Health insurance may not cover medications prescribed for off-label use. Purchasing medications for OLDU, even when prescribed by a HCP, may be cost-prohibitive.
- HCPs and patients/caregivers should consider how they would define and determine efficacy if considering OLDU. Consideration should be given to potential measures of clinical or biochemical response, and baseline evaluations should be completed when possible, to allow for objective measurement of such a response.

This document is intended to provide general information and references regarding off-label drug use. For more detailed information on the rationale for and use of a specific off-label drug, please see drug-specific documents which will be made available on NTSAD's website when they are completed.

This document was organized by the National Tay-Sachs & Allied Diseases Association (NTSAD) Research Committee working group. It was authored by Staci Kallish, DO, from Penn Medicine with input from other NTSAD Research Committee members and members of the NTSAD Scientific Advisory Committee.

If you have additional questions, please contact research@ntsad.org.

References:

- Understanding unapproved use of approved drugs “off label”, from the US FDA site <https://www.fda.gov/patients/learn-about-expanded-access-and-other-treatment-options/understanding-unapproved-use-approved-drugs-label>, updated 2/5/2018.
- Furey K & Wilkins K. Prescribing “off-label”: what should a physician disclose? *AMA J of Ethics*. 2016;18(6):587-593.
- Van Norman GA. Off-label use vs off-label marketing of drugs. Part 1: Off-label use - patient harms and prescriber responsibilities. *JACC*. 2023;8(2).
- Wittich CM, Burke CM, Lanier WL. Ten common questions (and their answers) about off-label drug use. *Mayo Clin Proc*. 2012;87(10):982-990.