Date: March 31, 2023
To: Secretary of the Expert Committee, Dr Benedikt Huttner
From: T1International and advocates living with diabetes from around the world
Re: Application for inclusion of pen devices and cartridges of human insulin for children and adults with diabetes in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines (EML and EMLc) (April 2023)

T1International believes in a world where everyone with type 1 diabetes – no matter where they live – has everything they need to survive and achieve their dreams. Our independent, patient-led organisation welcomes the continued efforts to improve access to insulin globally. We and our community strongly support this application to ensure that the EML includes both human and analogue insulins in the form of vials, cartridges (reusable pens) and disposable pens.

T1International firmly believes that every person with diabetes should have access to and be able to choose whatever insulin and delivery device is best for their body. The existing oversight of not including cartridges and disposable pens on the EML for human insulin exacerbates the already existing circumstances where poorer communities have to use medicine and devices that come with more challenges (difficulty drawing up doses, stigma, less flexibility, etc.). Human insulin in cartridges and pens should be clearly listed on the EML and EMLc.

We asked our community if they would choose to inject with an insulin pen or a vial and syringe, given the option. While our community supports individuals with diabetes having the choice of insulin delivery method that works best for them, everyone who weighed in would choose a pen. Advocates described benefits to pens including: more temperature friendly in hot climates, less likely to draw attention and incur harmful stigma, safer and more sustainable where electricity cuts are common, and much more durable and easy to manage. We have included select quotes as an addendum to this letter.

Failing to include disposable pens and cartridges for reusable pens on the EML may inhibit the uptake of long-acting insulin analogues, added to the EML in 2021, as patients who are able to access long-acting insulin analogues in pens must then have on hand both syringes and pen needles. Streamlining delivery methods for patients is beneficial not just for ease of use but also cost and accessibility. In addition to this change, it is also essential that analogue short-acting insulins be submitted for addition to the EML. While the long-acting analogue addition is to be applauded, many people cannot take advantage of long-acting analogues without also having access to short-acting analogue insulin.

In summary, T1International fully supports the inclusion of pen devices and cartridges of human insulin for people with diabetes in the WHO Model List of Essential Medicines (EML and EMLc) as a first step towards expanding choice of treatment regimen for people living with diabetes.

On behalf of T1International,

Elizabeth Pfiester, MS
Katherine Souris, MPH
Faith Amasowomwan,

T1International is a registered charitable incorporated organisation (CIO) in England and Wales (1168249).
Community Comments:
“I would always go for pens because of the electricity cuts we have here in Lebanon. It’s a safer and more sustainable option.”
- Person living with type 1 diabetes, Lebanon

“I’ve used both, pens and vials… and pens are definitely better. Pens work better especially in climates like some of ours where refrigeration is essential for vials. I also experienced going to school with both vials and pens and the convenience of pens. Less worrying about dropping and breaking the pen (I broke at least 3 vials in high school). Vials are just a lot more work.”
- Person living with type 1 diabetes, Zimbabwe

“I’ve been using pens for many years now, and prefer them definitely. They’re much more practical for me. Easier to carry around, to keep in temperature, and not as fragile.”
- Person living with type 1 diabetes, Mexico

“Many children in Panamá hide their diabetes from schools because they fear being kicked out of school… Pens, which are more discreet and easier to dose and carry, would make their lives and control easier to manage.”
- Parent of children with diabetes, Panamá

“I used to use big vials and was always worried about dropping or breaking them. Then I used small vials and liked that although they could break, they were small, easy to carry and did not contaminate as much. I now use pens. I love how easy and safe they are to carry around, but it makes me sad to see all that plastic thrown out once I am done using them.”
- Person living with type 1 diabetes, Costa Rica

“In Sweden we use vials only if we have an insulin pump. Before the pump, I had pens and was satisfied with them. Easy to have in a pocket, or carry in a suitcase. And much more exact than vials and syringes I presume. The pen also had a memory, so you could see when and how big the last dose was.”
- Person living with type 1 diabetes, Sweden