

The Honorable Ron Wyden  
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Wyden,

Please take the necessary steps to ensure that Medicare beneficiaries continue to have access to life-saving obesity medications by urging the Trump Administration to direct the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to finalize into regulation the Medicare coverage of obesity medications.

The Coalition of Local Health Officials (CLHO) advocates on behalf of all 33 local health departments in the state of Oregon. CLHO works with public health system partners to advocate for effective public health policies, programs, and funding to support local public health.

According to figures from the Oregon Health Authority, obesity is the second leading cause of preventable death in Oregon, causing an estimated 1,500 deaths each year. Obesity is a major risk factor for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. The prevalence of obesity and its comorbidities in Oregon is on the rise. In 2017, 29.0% of Oregon adults had obesity. That proportion has almost tripled since 1990, when 10.7% of Oregon adults were living with the disease.

As is true nationally, obesity has a disproportionate impact on communities of color. OHA shows that Adult African Americans (35.8%), American Indian/Alaska Natives (40.6%), Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (45.1%), and Hispanics (37.0%) are more likely to be obese than whites (28.8%) or Asians.

Obesity is a major driver of public health spending due to the current lack of coverage for effective treatments. A report by the Joint Economic Committee estimates that in 2023 obesity will cause \$5,155 in average excess medical costs per person suffering from the condition. This corresponds to \$520 billion in total additional healthcare costs in 2023 alone. Furthermore, the CDC reports that obesity-related expenses contribute to nearly \$1.73 trillion in annual spending, representing 9.3% of U.S. GDP overall.

Obesity-related diseases impact county and local budgets as well, but advancements in treatments may offer an important opportunity to improve health while creating an efficient avenue toward savings. The CMS decision to consider coverage of U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved obesity medications aligns with current medical consensus that these medications are part of the comprehensive treatment toolbox for obesity, not merely "agents for weight loss." If finalized into regulation, this decision would remove a significant barrier to treatment for older adults, Americans living with disabilities, and many beneficiaries who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid.

Finalizing this proposed rule would ensure continued coverage for potentially 26.2 million Medicaid beneficiaries, 4.2 million state employees, and 1.4 million Americans in state health exchange plans where obesity medication coverage currently exists. By extending access to FDA-approved obesity medications for people living with obesity who lack access to comprehensive, evidence-based care in Medicare and Medicaid, this policy will be key to addressing the nation's chronic disease crisis and making America healthy again.

A recent USC Schaeffer Center white paper found that Medicare coverage for new obesity treatments could generate approximately \$175 billion in cost offsets to Medicare in the first 10 years alone. By 30 years, cost offsets to Medicare would increase to \$700 billion. Greater coverage for and access to anti-obesity treatments is a win-win for cost savings and public health. These treatments have the potential to achieve a net decrease in government expenditures while at the same time improving health outcomes.

On behalf of those on the front line of public health here in Oregon, I urge you to encourage the administration to finalize CMS's decision into regulation to ensure that millions of older adults who rely on these life-saving medications can continue to access them as Medicare beneficiaries. Thank you for your leadership in promoting the health and well-being of Oregonians and all Americans.

Sincerely,  
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