



# ADVOCACY NEWS ADVOCACY ACTION

## **2013 – Time to Make Some Noise!**

*by Chris Gallagher, OAC Policy Consultant*

On November 6, 2012, President Barack Obama was re-elected to a second term as President of the United States by winning a convincing number of electoral votes. However, given that the popular vote was split fairly evenly, many believe that the President will need to reach across the aisle and work with Republicans on a number of key issues, such as the economy and entitlement programs like Medicare and Medicaid.

The 113th Congress convenes this month with a Republican-led House and a Democrat-led Senate with Democrats picking up a number of seats in the Senate to strengthen their hold on the chamber. Despite this fact, the GOP maintains a strong hold on the House and still maintains more than 40 seats in the Senate – the critical number to allow them to block any partisan legislation.

### **WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN FOR YOU?**

Probably the most significant outcome of President Obama winning a second term will be that the Affordable Care Act will be fully implemented throughout the next four years. As such, many states will now be scrambling to enact their state health exchange plans – a key component for expanding access to, and coverage of, essential health benefits (EHB) under the healthcare reform law. Whether these state EHB packages will cover the full spectrum of evidence-based obesity treatment services remains to be seen.

### **WHERE ARE WE NOW?**

At press time, only 26 states had signaled to the federal government that they plan to establish their own health exchange AND have submitted their benchmark plan choice that will determine their state's EHB package. Sadly, a majority of these states have chosen small group market plans that tend to exclude coverage for all obesity treatment services.

These recent state actions have been troubling to those affected by obesity. To address these concerns, the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) joined with other leading groups from the obesity community in sending a strong letter to Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Kathleen Sebelius – urging HHS to carefully review

each state's selected benchmark plan to ensure that the product covers all medically necessary obesity treatment services across the care continuum.

While OAC and the obesity community continue to hammer policymakers about the need to both prevent and treat obesity, Congress and State legislatures continue to ignore the disease of obesity and balk at any efforts to ensure parity in health plan coverage for obesity treatment. Clearly, we need to make more noise – and that noise must come from the millions of Americans affected by obesity and the healthcare professionals who treat them.

### **LET'S MAKE SOME NOISE – SUPPORT THE OAC'S EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A CONGRESSIONAL TREAT OBESITY CAUCUS!**

In late 2012, the obesity community reached out to every member of Congress to gauge whether any Senator or House Member would be willing to establish a Congressional Treat Obesity Caucus to help highlight the need for both prevention and treatment of obesity. Despite the fact that obesity affects at least one in three Americans, there was not an overwhelming positive response from Capitol Hill regarding the need for a caucus focused solely on obesity treatment issues.

Currently, there are more than 200 Congressional caucuses established for a wide range of topics including health issues such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis and mental illness. Others focus on rural healthcare issues or health disparities. Needless to say, if there is a worthy cause, there is a congressional caucus for it – even for things such as algae energy, sweeteners, wild salmon, cement, soil, steel, contaminated dry-wall and even bourbon.

If you think treating obesity deserves its own caucus and needs to be taken seriously, go to the OAC's Legislative Action Center NOW and reach out to your home state legislators to see where they stand on treating obesity seriously. Visit the Action Center now at [capwiz.com/obesityaction/home/](http://capwiz.com/obesityaction/home/).



# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

## LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

### Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
  - Community Discussion Forum
  - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



**JOIN TODAY: GO TO [OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN](http://OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN)**

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