



**OAC Supports Passage of House Bill 1315/Senate Bill 674
to Expand Coverage of Anti-Obesity Medications for TennCare Beneficiaries**

On behalf of the Obesity Action Coalition, a national non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by the disease of obesity, we are pleased to express our strong support for passage of House Bill (HB) 1315/Senate Bill (SB) 674, which would allow for coverage of anti-obesity medications (AOMs) for TennCare beneficiaries. The Obesity Action Coalition proudly serves almost 3,000 members living in Tennessee and backed by more than 78,000 members across the United States. We applaud this legislation, as it is a direct outcome of the work of the Chronic Weight Management Task Force as reflected in its final report to the General Assembly last September.

Throughout the past decades, the prevalence of obesity has skyrocketed across our country and in Tennessee – with 35 percent of adults and more than 20 percent of children (ages 10-17) in the state currently affected by obesity. Despite this fact, many policymakers continue to view obesity as a lifestyle choice or personal failing. Others acknowledge that obesity is a chronic and complex disease, but they believe that all that's needed is more robust prevention. These perceptions and attitudes, coupled with bias and stigma, have resulted in health insurance plans taking vastly different approaches in determining what and how obesity treatment services are covered for their members. It's time for health plans to adopt a comprehensive benefit approach toward treating obesity.

There are multiple evidence-based treatments for people with obesity that mitigate the impacts of the disease and improve health outcomes. Unfortunately, the present landscape of obesity treatment coverage remains piecemeal and laden with arbitrary hurdles to receive comprehensive care. We applaud Tennessee for moving to eliminate these random and unscientific barriers to care – both for the long term and immediate health of those affected by obesity!

Since 2013, when the American Medical Association adopted formal policy declaring obesity as a complex and chronic disease and supporting patient access to the full continuum of evidence-based obesity care, numerous federal and state policy organizations have echoed the AMA's position. These include the National Council of Insurance Legislators, National Lieutenant Governors Association, National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators, and the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, and the Federal Office of Personnel Management.

And recently, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released their evidence-based recommendations on medical care for those age 2 and older as part of its new “Clinical Practice Guideline (CPG) for the Evaluation and Treatment of Children and Adolescents with Obesity.” The AAP guidelines contain key action statements, which represent evidence-based recommendations for evaluating and treating children with overweight and obesity and related health concerns.

These recommendations include motivational interviewing, intensive health behavior and lifestyle treatment, pharmacotherapy and metabolic and bariatric surgery. The approach considers the child’s health status, family system, community context, and resources. The comprehensive evidence-based recommendations included in the CPG reflect just how far the understanding and care of childhood obesity has come and Tennessee should be applauded for its forward thinking on obesity care – especially for those most in need.

Our country must acknowledge obesity for the chronic disease that it is and take steps to treat it in the same serious fashion as other chronic disease states such as diabetes and hypertension. **We urge the Tennessee General Assembly to support House Bill 1315/Senate Bill 674** and stand up for coverage of all medically necessary obesity treatment avenues – including FDA-approved anti-obesity medications.