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April 22, 2024

The Honorable Fred Baldwin  
The Honorable Dan Zwonitzer  
Joint Labor, Health and Social Services Committee  
Wyoming State Legislature  
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82002

RE: Consideration of Medicaid Coverage of Obesity Medications

Dear Chairs Baldwin and Zwonitzer,

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments to the Joint Labor, Health and Social Services Committee regarding the Wyoming Department of Health's presentation on FDA-approved obesity medications. We appreciate that the Committee will be considering coverage of this critical component of comprehensive obesity care during its April 29<sup>th</sup> hearing. We strongly encourage the Committee to support addition of obesity medications as a benefit for Wyoming Medicaid beneficiaries.

The OAC is a national non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by the disease of obesity and proudly serves 406 members living in Wyoming as well as more than 80,000 members across the United States. Throughout the past decades, the prevalence of obesity has skyrocketed across our country and in Wyoming – with 34 percent of adults and more than 11 percent of children (ages 10- 17) in the state currently affected by obesity.

Despite these facts, 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 (public and private) 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 Wyoming for exploring ways to improve the Medicaid program – 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, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators, and the Federal Office of Personnel Management.

Further, 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

**The mission of the Obesity Action Coalition is to elevate and empower those affected by obesity**

through education, advocacy and support.

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.

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 Wyoming legislature to advance policies that provide coverage of all medically necessary obesity treatment avenues – including FDA-approved obesity medications.

As a voice for people living with obesity, OAC looks forward to working with the state of Wyoming to ensure Medicaid recipients have access to comprehensive obesity care for this complex and chronic disease. We would be happy to meet and share further information and perspectives of people living with obesity. Should you have questions or need additional information, please reach out to our Policy Advisor, Chris Gallagher at [chris@potomaccurrents.com](mailto:chris@potomaccurrents.com).

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Nadglowski, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Joseph Nadglowski, Jr.  
OAC President and CEO