



**4511 North Himes Ave., Suite  
250  
Tampa, FL 33614**

**(800) 717-3117  
(813) 872-7835  
Fax: (813) 873-7838**

**[info@obesityaction.org](mailto:info@obesityaction.org)**

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ATTN: Members of the Group Insurance Board

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is pleased to provide the following comments regarding the upcoming November 15, 2023, meeting of the Wisconsin Employee Trust Fund (ETF) Group Insurance Board (GIB) – specifically the Board’s consideration of state employee health plan coverage for pharmacotherapy and intensive behavioral therapy (IBT) for the treatment of overweight or obesity.

The OAC is the leading national non-profit dedicated to serving people living with obesity through awareness, support, education, and advocacy. Our vision is to create a society where all individuals are treated with respect and without discrimination or bias regardless of their size or weight. We strive for those affected by the disease of obesity to have the right to access safe and effective treatment options. And we educate all individuals to understand that when it comes to health, weight matters. OAC has a strong and growing membership of over 80,000 individuals living with obesity, across the United States and 1,326 members in Wisconsin.

Our organization truly appreciates the positive step that the GIB took to expand coverage of bariatric surgery and required precursor weight management and nutrition services for members with BMI of 35 or greater in 2020, we believe it is critical that state employees have access to all evidence-based treatment tools for obesity.

### **Obesity is a Chronic Disease**

Obesity is driven by strong biology, not by choice. Obesity is a serious chronic disease that requires treatment and management just like diabetes, cancer, or high blood pressure. Obesity has been recognized as a disease by major medical organizations such as the American Medical Association, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, National Institutes of Health, and the World Health Organization.

### **Patients are Entitled to Care**

AMA’s recognition of obesity as a disease in 2013 was the catalyst behind numerous other organizations declaring support for patient access to and coverage for comprehensive obesity care, such as the National Council of Insurance Legislators, National Lieutenant Governors Association, National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators, National Black Caucus of State Legislators, Veterans Administration, the Department of Defense, and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program.

### **The Double Standard for Obesity Care**

Despite the broad acceptance of obesity as a chronic disease and the recognition that patients deserve access to care, many policymakers continue to apply a double standard when evaluating coverage of obesity care – especially in the areas of utilization, cost, and return-on-investment (ROI).

#### Utilization

We know that obesity rates continue to rise with more than 42 percent of Americans affected by obesity nationwide – including more than 37 percent of Wisconsinites who currently struggle with this complex and chronic disease. Too often though, policymakers will extrapolate these rates into utilization figures for calculating potential costs should everyone affected suddenly seek care and access to treatment. In reality, only a small fraction of individuals with obesity actively seeks out treatment. Policymakers must refrain from using unrealistic utilization projections to deny coverage.

## Cost

Policymakers will often apply unrealistic utilization numbers with the industry-posted list price for these GLP-1 medications as opposed to the net cost that the plan pays after rebates. A recent study by the American Enterprise Institute, entitled “Estimating the Cost of New Treatments for Diabetes and Obesity” found that, on average, the net price for one month of Ozempic is \$290 and \$701 for Wegovy as opposed to the list prices for these drugs of \$936 and \$1349, respectively.<sup>1</sup> And these prices will continue to decrease as evidenced by the \$1060 list price for Eli Lilly’s newly approved AOM Zepbound. We assume that this price competition will only accelerate given the many other AOMs that are in the FDA approval pipeline.

## Return on Investment

As a nation, we must stop evaluating coverage of obesity care through a return-on-investment lens. What other chronic disease state is judged along these cost/benefit parameters? Would we be looking at ROI studies if we were talking about treating childhood cancer or heart disease? The goal of healthcare is not about saving money. It’s about improving the health and well-being of people.

## **Lifesaving Obesity Care**

Policymakers can no longer ignore the lifesaving benefits associated with obesity treatment given the latest full results of the SELECT study that were just published in the New England Journal of Medicine, which show a 20 percent reduction in major adverse cardiovascular events. Continued denial of coverage of AOMs such as semaglutide will lead to more cardiovascular deaths, strokes, and heart attacks in people with obesity. This landmark study makes one thing unmistakable -- obesity is a chronic, treatable disease where effective treatment can save and transform lives.

With these data in hand, OAC believes the Board must act to provide coverage for these medications beginning in 2025. Failure to act during the GIB’s November 15, 2023, meeting will place state employees at higher risk for major cardiovascular events throughout both 2024 and 2025. Again, we appreciate this opportunity to provide public comment on these critical issues. Should you have questions or need additional information, please contact our Policy Advisor, Chris Gallagher at [chris@potomaccurrents.com](mailto:chris@potomaccurrents.com). Thank you.

Sincerely



Joseph Nadglowski, Jr.  
OAC President and CEO

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<sup>1</sup> American Enterprise Institute. Estimating the Costs for New Treatment for Diabetes and Obesity. <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Estimating-the-Cost-of-New-Treatments-for-Diabetes-and-Obesity.pdf?x91208>