

August 10, 2012

RE: Public Comment on the Essential Benefit Benchmark Plan Selection

In the coming weeks, the State of Nevada will move forward in selecting a benchmark health plan to define the scope of its essential health benefits package for its health exchange plan. At this critical juncture, the leading organizations of the obesity community implore the state to recognize our country's rising obesity epidemic and the importance of ensuring patient access to the full continuum of medically necessary interventions (behavioral, nutritional, pharmaceutical, psychosocial, medical and surgical) to treat those affected by obesity.

Specifically, we are recommending that the State adopt the Public Employees' Benefits Program as the model for its essential health benefits program as it covers many of the multidisciplinary services to treat obesity (nutritional counseling, behavior modification and psychosocial counseling, pharmacotherapy, medical weight management, and bariatric surgery). In fact, we find the State of Nevada's Public Employees' Benefits Program to be one of the most forward thinking -- both in its recognition of obesity as a chronic disease and its aggressive approach to providing comprehensive treatment avenues for those affected.

Let's Treat Obesity with the Respect, Urgency, and Action it Deserves!

Too often, for too long, private health plans have excluded coverage for obesity treatment services -- partly due to shortsighted cost savings efforts and partly due to the false assumption that these services are either not medically necessary, or not in line with generally accepted standards of medical care despite scientific evidence to the contrary.

Just like many other serious medical conditions, obesity is a complex, multifactorial chronic disease, which requires a multidisciplinary treatment approach. This approach must encompass the best standards of care, both in terms of the treatments chosen and the clinical environment in which they are delivered. Such treatments should be reimbursed as any other disease therapy would be.

For these reasons, we applaud the approach taken by the State of Nevada's Public Employees' Benefits Program for recognizing that obesity is a serious chronic disease that deserves to be treated seriously in the same fashion as diabetes, heart disease or cancer.

Adoption of this plan as the state's benchmark will afford those affected by obesity with the same medically necessary treatment avenues afforded to all others who suffer from chronic disease.

As the State of Nevada moves forward on this critical decision, we look forward to working with policymakers in their efforts to provide comprehensive multidisciplinary treatment services for those affected by this chronic disease.

Sincerely,



Jaime Ponce, M.D.
President, American Society for Metabolic & Bariatric Surgery
www.asmb.org



Joseph Nadglowski, Jr.
President/CEO, Obesity Action Coalition
www.obesityaction.org



Ethan Bergman, Ph.D., R.D.
President, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
www.eatright.org



Patrick O'Neil, Ph.D.
President, The Obesity Society
www.obesity.org



David Bryman, D.O.
President, American Society of Bariatric Physicians
www.asbp.org