



Alliance for Women's
Health & Prevention

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United States Senate Committee on Finance
Attn. Editorial and Document Section
Rm. SD-219
Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Statement Regarding April 11, 2024 "Bolstering Chronic Care through Medicare Physician Payment" Hearing

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Dear Senator Wyden, Senator Crapo, and Members of the Senate Committee on Finance,

The Alliance for Women's Health and Prevention (AWHP) respectfully requests that you prioritize the impact of obesity on America's seniors as you consider legislative proposals to update and strengthen Medicare service payment and delivery, including providing coverage for anti-obesity medications (AOMs). As an organization focused on women's preventive health, **AWHP recognizes that obesity is a chronic disease with a significant impact on women, including those with coverage through Medicare.**

Obesity is a chronic, treatable disease that affects more than [3 in 10 women](#) nationwide and has a [disproportionate impact](#) on women of color. It is associated with over 200 other chronic conditions, including many that specifically affect women throughout their lives, such as breast and ovarian cancers as well as fertility issues. Women with obesity are also more likely to face harmful social stigma and discrimination. For instance, women with obesity are [less likely](#) to be promoted at work, and as many as [69% of women](#) with obesity face weight bias in healthcare settings. Finally, obesity has a tremendous economic burden, with economic costs (both direct and indirect) totaling [\\$1.72 trillion in 2018](#). Given obesity's extensive impact, AWHP believes that insurance coverage for the full scope of obesity care options is critical to improving women's health. Evidence-based obesity care includes counseling or intensive behavioral therapy, behavior modification, AOMs, weight loss surgeries, and nutrition services.

Unfortunately, even though obesity has serious consequences, especially for women, it is often misunderstood, leading to health insurance barriers that keep the full range of obesity care options out of reach for many women—particularly AOMs. In fact, just [half of U.S. employers](#) currently cover, or are considering covering, the latest generation of AOMs. Only [16 state Medicaid programs](#) cover AOMs. Notably, [Medicare does not cover](#) AOMs.

Medicare coverage for comprehensive obesity care is critical to ensure that women over 65 living with obesity can access the care they need. **As such, AWHP strongly supports the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA), bipartisan legislation that would ensure that Medicare beneficiaries have access to the full scope of obesity care options, including AOMs.** Ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries and the providers who care for them have access to all evidence-based options for treating this disease is only fair. We wouldn't place this type of restriction on care for other chronic diseases like cancer or heart disease. As such, AWHP strongly encourages the Senate Committee on Finance to prioritize this topic in its future discussions on improvements to the Medicare program.

AWHP, along with leading stakeholders from across the healthcare community, recently launched the EveryBODY Covered campaign, a first-of-its-kind initiative aiming to activate women to advocate for insurance coverage of comprehensive obesity care. **We believe that addressing obesity requires a comprehensive approach that includes equitable access to all evidence-based treatments and interventions.** We encourage you to refer to the resources available on our website (everybodycovered.org) for more information about obesity's particular impact on women, and we appreciate your attention to addressing obesity and supporting women's health.

Respectfully,

Millicent Gorham, CEO
Alliance for Women's Health and Prevention