



American Medical Women's Association  
The Vision and Voice of Women in Medicine since 1915

Re: Addressing the Obesity Epidemic: A Women's Health Perspective

September 9, 2024

The Honorable Ron Wyden, Chairman  
Senate Finance Committee  
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo, Ranking Member  
Senate Finance Committee  
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Wyden, Ranking Member Crapo, and Committee Members,

On behalf of the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) and the undersigned women's organizations and women-led organizations, we are writing to express our concern about the growing epidemic of obesity and its profound implications on women's health through the lifespan. We must address obesity as a critical challenge in advancing the health of the nation.

The rising rates of obesity are cause for alarm. One decade ago, no state had an adult obesity prevalence at or above 35%, yet now at least 22 states report a rate of 35% or higher. ([CDC](#), [CDC](#)) Nationally, the overall obesity rate stands at 42.4%, although women of color bear a disproportionately higher burden, with non-Hispanic Black women experiencing the highest prevalence at 56.9%. ([CDC](#)) In addition, women have a higher prevalence of severe obesity (11.5% women vs. 6.9% men). ([CDC](#)) Recognizing and treating obesity as a chronic disease is paramount to reversing this epidemic.

The **Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA, [S.2407](#))** will do just that. This bill is aimed to help improve access to care by expanding Medicare coverage of intensive behavioral therapy for obesity and allowing coverage under Medicare's prescription drug benefit of drugs used for the treatment of obesity for identified populations.

Here's why this issue deserves your attention and action:

- **Obesity and Cardiovascular Disease:** Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of death in women in the U.S. and is responsible for about 1 in every 5 female deaths. ([CDC](#)) Obesity is an independent risk factor for CVD, but it also impacts other cardiac risk factors, including diabetes, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia.
- **Obesity and Cancer:** Obesity is linked to a higher risk for 13 types of cancers. These cancers represent 40% of all cancers diagnosed in the United States each year. ([CDC](#))
- **Obesity and Infertility:** Roughly 1 in 6 people experience infertility worldwide, and obesity is a risk factor for infertility. ([FIGO](#), [WHO](#))

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- **Obesity and Maternal Mortality:** The U.S. already has the highest rate of maternal mortality among developed nations. We know that the risk of maternal death increases with body mass index (BMI). ([Nature](#))
- **Obesity and Mental Health:** The relationship between obesity and mental health is intricate and bidirectional - and of significance given the current mental health crisis in the U.S. Individuals who have obesity may face a range of psychological challenges, such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Conversely, mental health disorders can contribute to obesity through behaviors like emotional eating, sedentary lifestyles, or medication side effects. ([PCD](#))
- **Obesity and Chronic Disease:** Obesity can increase the risk of numerous health issues such as stroke, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, Alzheimer's disease, liver disease, and respiratory problems. ([CDC](#))
- **Economic Burden of Obesity.** Obesity is estimated to contribute \$173 billion in excess medical costs annually. ([CDC](#)) Medical costs for adults who have obesity are on average \$1,861 higher than medical costs for people with healthy weight. ([CDC](#)) And forecasting models have shown us that an investment now in addressing obesity will lead to future healthcare savings for the treatment of obesity related chronic conditions. ([USC Schaeffer, Milliman Report Medicaid, Milliman Report Medicare](#))

We urge you to take the necessary steps to address barriers to obesity care by supporting the **Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA, S.2407)**. By prioritizing access to comprehensive obesity care, we can combat this significant health challenge with the same rigor we apply to other chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension. And together, through action and innovation, we can improve the health and medical care for countless women.

We hope that we can count on your support.

Sincerely,

American Medical Women's Association  
Alliance for Women's Health and Prevention  
American College of Nurse-Midwives  
American College of Physicians  
American Gastroenterological Association  
American Liver Foundation  
American Nurses Association  
American Society for Preventive Cardiology  
American Society for Reproductive Medicine  
Asian and Pacific Islander American Health Forum  
Asian Health Coalition  
Association of Black Women Physicians  
Association of Women Surgeons

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Black Women's Health Imperative  
Bone Health and Osteoporosis Foundation  
Choose Healthy Life  
Color of Gastrointestinal Illnesses  
Community Liver Alliance  
DiabetesSisters  
Global Initiative Against HPV and Cervical Cancer  
Global Liver Institute  
HealthyWomen  
MANA, A National Latina Organization  
National Association of Hispanic Nurses  
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health  
National Black Nurses Association, Inc  
National Consumers League  
National Council of Negro Women, Inc  
National Council on Aging  
National Hispanic Council on Aging  
National Hispanic Health Foundation  
National Hispanic Medical Association  
National Medical Association  
National Menopause Foundation  
National Women's Health Network  
Nurses Obesity Network  
Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association  
Society for Women's Health Research  
The Mended Hearts, Inc.  
WomenHeart

CC: Full Senate Finance Committee Membership