

June 22, 2015

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
United States Senator
131 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Warner
United States Senator
475 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Isakson and Warner:

The undersigned organizations admire the commitment of the Senate Finance Committee for its willingness to address the challenges posed by Medicare beneficiaries suffering from chronic conditions and are encouraged by the formation of the full Finance Committee chronic care working group. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input regarding policy considerations that the working group should address surrounding chronic disease care and urge that the recommendations include policy options to address obesity.

Obesity rates in America have reached epic proportions. Today, more than one in three U.S. adults have obesity. In the Medicare population, the statistics are even more concerning with more than 40 percent of adults between the ages of 65 to 74 having obesity. Absent change, some projections show that, by 2030, 50 percent of Americans will have obesity. Clearly, this is a problem we can no longer afford to ignore.

These sobering facts and the growing science surrounding obesity underscore the importance of developing policy to facilitate patient access to the full continuum of care of evidence-based obesity treatment modalities including behavioral, pharmaceutical, psychosocial, nutritional, social, and surgical interventions. Numerous healthcare professional and patient organizations recognize that obesity is a chronic medical condition that is associated with, or a precursor to, more than 90 other chronic medical conditions including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cancer.

We now also better understand the costs of obesity – both to our country and to those affected by this complex and chronic disease. In terms of financial cost, one analysis found that the annual medical costs for individuals with obesity are \$2,741 higher than medical costs for a patient of normal weight. All told, direct U.S. healthcare spending attributable to obesity is over \$200 billion every year. If one extrapolated these costs to the current percentage of Medicare beneficiaries affected by obesity, the annual price tag for treating obesity costs the Medicare program an additional \$55 billion every year.

We believe that treating and preventing obesity is essential to preventing the onset of other, costly medical conditions. Accordingly, we are hopeful that the chronic care working group will acknowledge the necessity for a comprehensive approach to preventing, identifying, and treating obesity and include bipartisan solutions in their recommendations to the Chairman and Ranking Member.

We appreciate your consideration of this important matter and look forward to discussing in more detail during future deliberations of the working group.

Sincerely,

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
American Academy of Physician Assistants
American College of Sports Medicine
American Council on Exercise
American Family Children's Hospital
American Heart Association
American Medical Women's Association
American Psychological Association
American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery
American Society of Bariatric Physicians
Arena Pharmaceuticals
Campaign to End Obesity Action Fund
Eisai, Inc.
Endocrine Society
EnteroMedics, Inc.
Focused Fitness
Healthcare Leadership Council
International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association
Men's Health Network
NAACP
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
National Association of County and City Health Officials
National Center for Weight and Wellness
National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity
National Hispanic Medical Association
Novo Nordisk, Inc.
Obesity Action Coalition
Orexigen Therapeutics, Inc.
Sports and Fitness Industry Association
Takeda Pharmaceuticals USA, Inc.
The Obesity Society
University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics
VIVUS, Inc.
YMCA of the USA

CC: The Honorable Orrin Hatch, Chairman, Senate Committee on Finance
The Honorable Ron Wyden, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Finance