

DIABETES PATIENT ADVOCACY COALITION



Support the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act of 2021 (S. 596/H.R. 1577)

Sponsored by Sens. Tom Carper (D-DE) and Bill Cassidy (R-LA)

Reps. Ron Kind (D-WI), Tom Reed (R-NY), Raul Ruiz (D-CA), and Brad Wenstrup (R-OH)

About the Diabetes Patient Advocacy Coalition (DPAC): DPAC is an alliance of people with diabetes, caregivers, patient advocates, health professionals, diabetes organizations and companies working together to support public policy initiatives on behalf of all 34.2 million Americans with diabetes. As an organization co-founded and run by people with diabetes, DPAC seeks to ensure the safety and quality of medications, devices and services, and aims to improve access to care.

Background: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), obesity rates in the U.S. have increased dramatically over the last 30 years, and obesity is now considered an epidemic. Obesity leaves Americans vulnerable to more than 200 serious health conditions including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and stroke, and is the top comorbidity for serious cases of COVID-19 or death. In the U.S., obesity is linked to an overall increase in annual healthcare costs of \$1,861 per adult, totaling \$170 billion in excess expenditures annually.

A growing number of treatment options and shifts in healthcare have taken place as professional societies like the American Medical Association recognize the significance of addressing this epidemic. However, Medicare and many other payers have not kept pace with the science, leaving millions of people vulnerable to costly chronic illnesses and premature death due to lack of treatment for obesity. A landmark National Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) study found that the progression from prediabetes to type 2 diabetes is reduced by 59% when lifestyle modifications are made. However, under current law, Medicare only covers and pays for one of these innovative treatments – known as intensive behavioral therapy (IBT) – as a preventive service, and only when it is provided by a primary care provider in the primary care setting, restricting access to the continuum of care.

Need: S. 596/H.R. 1577 would allow other physician specialties, clinical psychologists, registered dietitians, and nutrition professionals, as well as evidence-based, community-based lifestyle counseling programs approved by the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), to offer IBT for Medicare beneficiaries. Expanding the pool of providers offering those services will lead to increased access and utilization of IBT by Medicare beneficiaries with obesity.

The bill would also include Medicare Part D coverage of FDA-approved medications for chronic weight management. When Medicare Part D was created in 2006, there were no widely-accepted FDA-approved obesity drugs on the market, and therefore Congress did not include obesity drugs in Part D coverage. However, thanks to significant medical advances, several FDA-approved weight loss drugs are now available. This inappropriate ban on coverage of obesity medications creates an unreasonable barrier for patient access to these important medicines.

To be most effective, obesity management must encompass the best standards of treatments and coordination of care. This bill removes unnecessary barriers, which would allow a variety of qualified practitioners to effectively treat obesity using the full continuum for care to include IBT and prescription therapies. Providing coordinated, interdisciplinary care increases efficiency, which improves healthcare quality and reduces costs.

Request: Please cosponsor S. 596/H.R. 1577, the *Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA) of 2021*, to help prevent diabetes and ensure that Americans with or at risk of obesity can receive comprehensive IBT treatment in a variety of healthcare settings.

Contact:

Julie Babbage
Executive Director, DPAC
jbabbage@diabetespac.org
859-977-9460

George Huntley
Chief Executive Officer, DPAC
ghuntley@diabetesleadership.org
317-443-6063

Jared Sutton, Winning Strategies Washington
jsutton@wswdc.com
954-864-5634

Charla Penn, Winning Strategies Washington
charla@wswdc.com
202-589-0800