



**Alliance for
Patient Access**

January 27, 2025

Representative Robin Weisz
Chair, House Human Services Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

Representative Matthew Ruby
Vice Chair, House Human Services Committee
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

RE: SUPPORT: HB 1451 – Medical assistance prescription drug benefits for antiobesity medication

Dear Chair Weisz and Vice Chair Ruby:

On behalf of the Alliance for Patient Access (AfPA), we are writing to express our strong support of HB 1451, which would require North Dakota Medicaid to include comprehensive coverage for the treatment of obesity. As you are aware, patients with obesity now have FDA-approved pharmacologic options to treat the chronic disease of obesity. However, ensuring patients can access appropriate obesity care is paramount to addressing the obesity epidemic.

Founded in 2006, AfPA is a national network of policy-minded health care providers who advocate for patient-centered care. AfPA supports health policies that reinforce clinical decision making, promote personalized care and protect the clinician-patient relationship. Motivated by these principles, AfPA members participate in clinician working groups, advocacy initiatives, stakeholder coalitions and the creation of educational materials. AfPA also manages an Obesity Initiative, convening health care providers across specialties dedicated to ensuring a patient-centered approach to obesity treatment.

The obesity epidemic in the United States is no secret. The New England Journal of Medicine predicts that 1 in 2 adults will have obesity by 2030, while 1 in 4 adults will have severe obesity. As you consider the overall health and well-being of North Dakotans, these numbers are impossible to ignore. Obesity is not an insular disease; we know it is related to a host of other diseases including certain cancers, heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes. Furthermore, obesity is expensive. The aggregate annual medical costs due to obesity among adults in the United States is over \$260 billion. Total obesity-related government expenditures, including Medicaid and Medicare spending and federal outlays, are estimated to be \$91.6 billion per year, approximately 30% of Medicare spending.¹

Importantly, in recent years, the FDA has approved several therapies for the treatment of obesity, meant to be used in conjunction with lifestyle changes. These treatment options have been revolutionary in ensuring patients and providers have additional tools to handle this complicated disease. Proper and effective treatment of obesity would benefit patients through improved health outcomes, as well as the health care system in the form of savings.

Given the impact of obesity, HB 1451 is an important step toward addressing this treatable disease. This legislation ensures that Medicaid beneficiaries will have access to the full complement of obesity treatment. Allowing patients and providers to access the full regimen of treatment options will have a significant impact on North Dakotans living with obesity.

¹ <https://www.jmcp.org/doi/10.18553/jmcp.2021.20410>

It is for these reasons that we believe HB 1451 is crucial to solving North Dakota's obesity epidemic. We respectfully request you allow this bill to advance through the legislative process, as it is imperative patients and providers have access to all available tools to treat obesity. If we can provide further details or answer any questions, please reach out to cmcpherson@allianceforpatientaccess.org or (202)951-7097.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Josie Cooper".

Josie Cooper
Executive Director
Alliance for Patient Access

CC:

Rep. Karen Anderson
Rep. Jayme Davis
Rep. Clayton Fegley
Rep. Dawson Holle
Rep. Carrie McLeod
Rep. Brandon Prichard

Rep. Mike Beltz
Rep. Gretchen Dobervich
Rep. Kathy Frelich
Rep. Dwight Kiefert
Rep. Todd Porter
Rep. Karen Rohr