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January 28, 2025

North Dakota State Capitol
600 East Boulevard
Bismarck, ND 58505-0360

RE: Support for House Bills 1451 and 1452 to improve access to evidence-based obesity treatments

Dear Representatives Nelson, Mitskog and O'Brien,

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) appreciates the opportunity to express support for the advancement and passage of House Bills 1451 and 1452 to amend North Dakota's Century Code, relating to medical assistance prescription drug benefits for obesity medications and to create and enact a new section to chapter 54-52.1 of the Century Code, relating to minimum standards for coverage of obesity medications for state employees.

The OAC is the leading national non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by the disease of obesity. We are pleased to express our strong support for passage of House Bills 1451 and 1452, to improve access to prescription drug coverage (obesity medications) for people living with obesity. The OAC proudly serves 230 members living in North Dakota and is backed by more than 85,000 members across the United States.

We applaud these pieces of legislation, as they would improve access to obesity care (obesity medications) and update state policies into alignment with advances in science and clinical standards. We agree that North Dakota medical assistance coverage, including Medicaid, must include comprehensive coverage for the treatment of obesity, which includes coverage for intensive behavioral therapy, metabolic and bariatric surgery, and obesity medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Throughout the past decades, the prevalence of obesity has skyrocketed across our country and in North Dakota – with 36 percent of adults and 15 percent of children (ages 6 - 17) in the state currently affected by obesity.¹

As you know, obesity is a complex chronic disease driven by strong biology, not by personal choice. A 2023 report found that treating obesity can reduce diabetes (-8.9%), hypertension (-2.3%), heart disease (-2.6%), cancer (-1.3%), and disability (-4.7%) over 10 years in private insurance coverage and Medicare.² The same assumptions can also be applied to Medicaid and state employee health plans. This report provides strong evidence to support Medicaid investment in obesity care.

¹ Trust for America's Health, State of Obesity 2024: Better Policies for a Healthier America.
<https://www.tfah.org/report-details/state-of-obesity-2024/>

² Alison Sexton Ward, PhD, Bryan Tysinger, PhD, PhuongGiang Nguyen, Dana Goldman, PhD and Darius Lakdawalla, PhD. Benefits of Medicare Coverage for Weight Loss Drugs. USC Schaeffer, 2023.



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As a voice for people living with obesity, OAC looks forward to working with the state of North Dakota to ensure Medicaid recipients access to comprehensive obesity care for this complex and chronic disease. We would be happy to meet and share further information and perspectives of people living with obesity. Should you have questions or need additional information, please reach out to our Policy Advisor, Chris Gallagher at chris@potomaccurrents.com. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Nadglowski", is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Joe Nadglowski
President & CEO
Obesity Action Coalition