PATIENT ADVOCATES

Obesity Coverage Advocacy Toolkit

American Gastroenterological Association
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PATIENT ADVOCATES
Writing a letter to a member of Congress

As a person living with obesity, you have the power to make a difference by sharing how this issue directly impacts your life and community. Sending a letter to your Congressperson is one way to ask for increased obesity treatment and care.

Who is my elected official?
To identify the House representative for your district, type your zip code into this search engine. Once you’ve identified your House representative, find his or her mailing address by searching on this page.

To identify your state Senators and find their mailing addresses, visit this page and select your state from the dropdown menu.

The following standard address can also be used for contacting your Senators:

The Honorable (Name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Urge your member of Congress to take action and support the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act by sending a personalized letter through Quorum.
Sample patient letter

Use the letter example below to write to your elected official and urge them to support the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act.

Date
Your Full Name
Your Full Address
Your City, State and Zip
Your Phone Number with Area Code
Your Email Address

The Honorable (Insert Elected Official's Name Here)
Elected Official's Address
Elected Official's City, State, Zip

Dear [Senator XX or Representative XX (House)],

As a constituent living in [city/state], and someone living with obesity, I am writing to urge you to support the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (H.R. 4818, S. 2407), which has just been reintroduced in Congress. If passed, this legislation would expand Medicare coverage to include prescription drugs for chronic weight management, behavioral counseling and other prevention and treatment options.

Nearly 42% of American adults have obesity and rates continue to rise. Despite this, current Medicare rules deny access to effective obesity care for millions of Americans. The passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act, however, could lead to increased obesity care coverage for all Americans since many private insurance companies model their covered health benefits to reflect Medicare beneficiaries.

I have firsthand experience of how this medical condition goes beyond basic lifestyle modifications and requires access to additional treatment options – that’s why this issue is so important to me. [Share your personal story and explain how the legislation/issue affects you and your family/community.]

Obesity has far-reaching socioeconomic implications beyond my personal experience. It impacts communities of color and people with intellectual disabilities at higher rates, exacerbating obesity-related health disparities in these communities. Additionally, obesity is linked to more than 200 diseases and disorders, including nonalcoholic fatty liver disease and nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure. According to a report released in March 2023 by The Obesity Federation, the economic impact of a high body mass index could reach $4.32 trillion annually if current trends continue.

We urgently need to change the way we view and care for obesity — the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act is an important first step.

Can I count on you to support the passage of the legislation?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Full Name]
Writing an op-ed

What is an op-ed?
An op-ed is a short article in a news outlet’s editorial section written to express an opinion or viewpoint to the community. Op-eds can be useful tools to change public opinion and spread awareness for how people think about obesity.

General tips:

• Research the news outlet to which you want to submit an op-ed.

• Make sure your article is within its guidelines and writing style.

• Keep your main message to the point. Many news outlets have a 400-600 word limit.

• Include your personal connection to the issue.

• Include research or facts to support your point of view.

• Look up the editor’s email address on the website and send in your writing.

• Accept small changes the editor may want to make to ensure proper grammar and writing style.

• Don’t give up! Try another news outlet if the first one does not accept your submission.
Sample op-ed

Use the sample op-ed below as a guide for writing your own.

**Treating obesity requires more than diet and exercise**

As someone who is living with obesity, I have had family, friends — even strangers — make comments that make me feel ashamed of the chronic disease that I live with. These people think they are acting with the best intentions, but they are hurtfully perpetuating the belief that obesity is the result of lifestyle choices, rather than a complex and serious disease that should be treated like other long-term health conditions such as cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

Obesity has long been misunderstood. Many believe it can be cured with more willpower, diet and exercise, but research has proven that obesity is a chronic and complex disease that impacts many systems of the body — cardiovascular, endocrine, psychological, and gastroenterological — to name just a few. This was further reinforced in 2013 when the American Medical Association recognized obesity as a disease. The evidence is clear: effectively treating and managing obesity requires a more nuanced, multifaceted approach — not just adjusting diet and exercise.

[Expand on how living with obesity has impacted your career, lifestyle, relationships, etc.]

Many people living with obesity believe their options are limited to lifestyle changes or surgery, but there is a full spectrum of treatment options available. The problem is that while some weight-loss programs, services and treatments are covered by insurance, many are not. To add to the hurdles, current Medicare rules deny access to some of the most effective obesity care for millions of Americans. That means that countless people are unable to access the care they need.

It's time to change how we view and manage obesity in the U.S. The Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA), which has just been reintroduced in Congress, would expand Medicare coverage to include prescription drugs for chronic weight management, behavioral counseling, and other prevention and treatment options. Because many private insurance companies model their covered health benefits to reflect Medicare beneficiaries, the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act could lead to increased obesity care coverage for all Americans. This legislation is a crucial step in the right direction. Reach out to your elected officials and encourage them to support the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act.
Calling a member of Congress

Calling your member of Congress is a useful way to ask for expanded access to obesity treatment and care. Keep in mind that Congressional office phones are often answered by staff, who will take your message and share your concerns with your elected official.

Who is my elected official?
Make sure you are reaching out to the appropriate elected official by using the tools below.

To identify the House representative for your district, type your zip code into this search engine.

To identify your state Senators, visit this page and select your state from the dropdown menu.

Once you have identified your elected officials, telephone numbers for Congressional offices can be found on the House and Senate websites.

Tips for the phone call
Below are general tips to keep in mind when calling a member of Congress.

- Be patient. Keep trying until you get a person to pick up.
- Introduce yourself, including your name and where you live.
- Explain why you are calling.
- Establish why your issue is important and the perspective you offer as a patient.
- Ask your member of Congress to take action.
- Thank the staffer for their time and consideration.
Sample phone call script
Below is a sample script to reference when calling your representative regarding obesity care and the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act.

Treating obesity requires more than diet and exercise

- Hi, my name is [First Last]. I am calling from [City/State].

- I’m calling [Senator XX or Representative XX (House)] to urge him/her to support the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (H.R. 4818, S. 2407), which has just been reintroduced in Congress. Obesity is a complex, chronic and misunderstood disease and needs to be addressed through legislation.

- The legislation would expand Medicare coverage to include screening and treatment of obesity from a diverse range of health care providers who specialize in obesity care, as well as include coverage of prescription drugs for long-term weight management, behavioral counseling, and other prevention and treatment options. Because many private insurance companies model their covered health benefits to reflect Medicare beneficiaries, the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act could lead to increased obesity care coverage for all Americans.

- Nearly 42% of American adults have obesity and obesity rates continue to increase, but many insurance plans do not cover necessary treatments. There is an urgent need for expanded access to affordable, effective obesity care, and the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act is an important first step.

- As someone living with obesity and in need of additional treatment options, this issue is important to me. [Share 1-2 sentences on why the bill is important to you and your community; your personal experience as a patient with obesity; and why you care about the issue.]

- Can I count on [senator or representative’s name] to support the passage of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act?

If you are told “no” or receive a noncommittal response:

- Thank you for your time and consideration.

If you are told “yes” or that the staffer will pass along the message:

- Thank you for your support.