



May 15, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy,

On behalf of the nearly 200,000 members of the Obesity Care Continuum (OCC), we urge you to include the policy provisions of the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA) of 2019 (H.R. 1530/S. 595) into the next COVID-19 relief package. This legislation aims to more effectively treat obesity in older Americans by improving Medicare beneficiaries' access to healthcare providers that are best suited to provide intensive behavioral therapy (IBT) and by allowing Medicare Part D to cover FDA-approved anti-obesity medications.

Recent research shows that obesity is the second greatest risk factor, after older age, for hospitalization among COVID-19 patients. For these reasons, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now state that older people and younger adults with serious medical conditions, such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, lung disease and asthma have a greater risk of becoming severely ill if they are infected with the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The connection between obesity and poor outcomes from respiratory illnesses is not unique to COVID-19. Obesity has been a significant contributor to negative outcomes in previous viral outbreaks (such as the 2009 H1N1 outbreak) and will likely be so in future outbreaks given the numerous comorbidities, reduction in respiratory volume, and inflammation associated with obesity. Additionally, this crisis has magnified the health disparities experienced by minority communities. Early data have demonstrated that African Americans, in particular, are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. These disparities are further magnified in the many minority communities that experience substantially higher rates of obesity and diabetes due, in part, to reduced access to health care, healthful foods, and safe opportunities to be active.

We appreciate that the primary sponsors of TROA (Representatives Kind, Guthrie, Ruiz and Reed) have reached out to you on this issue in their May 8th letter. We echo their conclusion that "updating Medicare's coverage policies to support the treatment and prevention of obesity should be part of a comprehensive response to COVID-19." We encourage you to help reduce this important driver of COVID-19 morbidity and mortality by incorporating the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act into the next COVID-19 relief package.

Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact OCC Washington Office Director Chris Gallagher via email at chris@potomaccurrents.com or telephone at 571-235-6475.

About the Obesity Care Continuum:

The leading obesity advocate groups founded the Obesity Care Continuum (OCC) in 2010 to better influence the healthcare reform debate and its impact on those affected by overweight and obesity. Currently, the OCC is composed of the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), The Obesity Society (TOS), the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND), the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS), and the Obesity Medicine Association (OMA). With a combined membership of nearly 200,000 patient and healthcare professional advocates, the OCC covers the full scope of care from nutrition, exercise and weight management through pharmacotherapy to device and bariatric surgery. Members of the OCC also challenge weight bias and stigma-oriented policies – whenever and wherever they occur.