



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Gilbert Burgos, MD, MPH
CHAIRMAN
Director of Medical Affairs
Elderplan/Homefirst
Bronx, NY

Elena Rios, MD, MSPH, MACP
PRESIDENT & CEO
National Hispanic Medical Association
Washington, DC

Bert Johansson, MD, PhD
CHAIRMAN-ELECT
Pediatrician
Pediatric Critical Care
El Paso, TX

Diana Ramos, MD, MPH, FACOG
SECRETARY
California Surgeon General
Los Angeles, CA

Elizabeth Lee-Rey, MD, MPH
TREASURER
Partner
Eastchester Medical Associates, PC
Bronx, NY

David Hayes Bautista, PhD
Director, Center on Latino Culture and Health
Professor, David Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA
Los Angeles, CA

Maria Carrasco, MD, MPH
Regional Physician Lead on Cultural Competence
Kaiser Permanente
Montebello, CA

Ricardo Correa, MD
Director, Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism
University of Arizona College of Medicine
Phoenix, AZ

Francisco Fernandez, MD
Founding Dean, Professor Emeritus
Department of Psychiatry
University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine
Harlingen, TX

Sylvia P. Preciado, MD
Internist
Huntington Hospital
Pasadena, CA

David E. Saucedo
Vice President, The Saucedo Company
El Paso, Texas

Leonardo Seoane, MD
Senior Vice President and CAO, Ochsner Health
New Orleans, LA

Brian Ternan
President and CEO, California Health and
Wellness/Health Net, Centene Corporation
Sacramento, CA

Claudia H. Zamora, MPA
Founder & CEO, Zamora Consulting Group
Washington, DC

Alvaro Galvis, MD, PhD
Chair, Council of Young Physicians
Attending Physician
Loma Linda University
San Bernardino, CA

Maria Santos, MD
Chair, Council of Residents
Family Medicine Resident
Duke Family Medicine Center
Durham, NC

Larissa De Sousa
President, LMSA
MD Candidate
Case Western Reserve
University School of Medicine

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Richard H. Carmona, MD, MPH, FACS
17th U.S. Surgeon General (2002-2006)
Chief of Health Innovation, Canyon Ranch
Distinguished Professor
Mel & Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health
MEZCOPH, University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ

Henry Cisneros
Chairman
CityView
San Antonio, TX

Linda Griego
President & CEO
Griego Enterprises, Inc.
Los Angeles, CA

Paloma Hernandez, MPH, MS
President & CEO
Urban Health Plan, Inc.
Bronx, NY

February 14, 2024

Senator Stephen Hershey
Republican Minority Leader
The Maryland Senate

Dear Honorable Senator Hershey,

We write to support coverage for FDA-approved anti-obesity medications, including those of the GLP-1 class, for patients diagnosed with obesity or overweight covered under Maryland Medicaid. According to recent research on obesity care, only .002 of people living with obesity are being treated with anti-obesity medications.

Obesity is recognized as a chronic disease, on par with hypertension and diabetes, by the American Medical Association. This year, several medical organizations, including the AMA, have updated their obesity guidelines to reflect the highly effective medical treatments that are now available to our patients. However, Medicare does not cover drugs prescribed to treat obesity, costing patients \$1,000 to \$1,300 a month, or over \$15,000 a year. Weight loss medication must be included in coverage to ensure people who suffer from obesity have access to adequate, affordable treatment.

Studies are showing that pharmacological treatment results in significant benefits in obesity-related complications including dyslipidemia, heart failure, fatty liver and hepatic steatosis, cardiovascular disease, and both prevention and remission of type two diabetes. Currently, there are about 711,000 Latinos and almost 2 million African Americans residing in Maryland. According to the CDC, Hispanic adults have the second highest age-adjusted prevalence of obesity, at 45.6%, and are therefore more likely to suffer the consequences of related health conditions. Marylanders with these conditions suffer adverse health outcomes, which disproportionately affect patients from marginalized racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, including children, and are cost drivers in our health system.

The federal Office of Personnel Management now requires obesity care and treatment, inclusive of pharmacotherapy options, for all federal employees effective January 1, 2023. The most recent data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, attests that Hispanic Americans were 1.2 times more likely to be obese than non-Hispanic whites, in 2018. Maryland has always been a forward-thinking innovator in health care, and it is time to bring our obesity policies up to that standard, especially for the most vulnerable population.

Maryland is already paying for obesity and its complications. With your support of the [Obesity Bill of Rights](#) and coverage for FDA-approved anti-obesity medications, you have an opportunity to make a real difference in these outcomes by increasing equitable access to effective treatment.

Best,

Elena Rios, MD, MSPH, MACP
President & CEO

National Hispanic Medical Association