
MARYLAND ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS



Date: March 4, 2024

Bill: [House Bill 0986](#) (SB 0594) – Maryland Medical Assistance Program – Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity

Sponsor: Delegate R. Lewis

Committee: Health and Government Operations Committee

Position: **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

Dear Delegate R. Lewis and HGO Committee,

The Maryland Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (“MAND”) represents about 900 registered and licensed dietitians-nutritionists in the state. Our members, like all registered dietitian nutritionists, work in a variety of settings such as hospitals, schools, supermarkets, the food industry, private practice, and long-term care. Our mission is to empower community members with access to nutrition education that strongly emphasizes evidence-based recommendations. MAND appreciates the opportunity to comment on House Bill 0986 (SB 0594), Maryland Medical Assistance Program Coverage for the Treatment of Obesity.

In Maryland, over 33% of adults have obesity; for African-Americans, that figure is over 41%.¹ Having overweight or obesity increases the risk of developing many related, often serious conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, some forms of cancer, and even adverse COVID outcomes.²⁻⁴

Obesity also has a substantial economic impact. Annual medical costs to treat obesity in Maryland are now estimated to be in excess of \$4.3 billion, based on 2017 Department of Health data (adjusted to 2024 dollars).⁵ And a recent national analysis found the annual aggregate medical cost of adult obesity exceeded \$260 billion.⁶ Furthermore, the average annual medical costs for those with obesity are \$2,500 higher than people in a healthy weight range.⁶⁻⁸ Fortunately, estimated returns for treating obesity range from \$2 to \$16 for each dollar invested.^{9,10} While treating obesity may be expensive, *not* treating it is more expensive.

HB 0986 would require the Maryland Medical Assistance Program to provide comprehensive coverage for the treatment of obesity. MAND agrees comprehensive coverage for obesity prevention and treatment is a vital step in improving the health of Marylanders; however, MAND feels this legislation is missing an essential component: medical nutrition therapy, including nutrition counseling provided

by registered dietitian-nutritionists for people with overweight and obesity. This revision is in accordance with the [2013 Maryland Benchmark Plan and Essential Health Benefits](#), which provides coverage for unlimited medical nutrition therapy and unlimited professional nutrition counseling by qualified practitioners, such as registered dietitian nutritionists.¹¹ Medical nutrition therapy provided by registered dietitian nutritionists has been shown to be effective in treating people with obesity, and may also improve other related measures, such as high blood pressure and overall quality of life.¹² Behavior-based medical nutrition therapy provided by registered dietitian nutritionists as part of an interdisciplinary team is also part of the recommended evidence-based practice guidelines to treat adults with overweight or obesity.¹³

We write in support of House Bill 0986 (SB 0594) which seeks to provide comprehensive coverage for the treatment of obesity with an amendment to also include medical nutrition therapy by a registered dietitian as a part of the comprehensive coverage options. MAND is also happy to engage with other stakeholders to advance discussion of other policy solutions.

MAND believes expanding coverage for obesity treatment to include medical nutrition therapy by registered dietitian nutritionists will help improve the health, wellbeing, and quality of life for those seeking obesity treatment in Maryland and may ultimately help to reduce healthcare costs in the long-run. **MAND therefore respectfully asks for a FAVORABLE REPORT WITH AMENDMENT on House Bill 0986.**

Thank you for your consideration,

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