



In Favor of: Senate Bill 496

Medical Assistance Program Obesity Coverage

Monica Billger, Director, State Government Affairs

American Diabetes Association

February 13, 2026

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes and Distinguished Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of the American Diabetes Association (ADA) and the over two million Marylanders living with obesity, I am writing in **support** of **Senate Bill 496** – with intention to repeal an unnecessary state-level exclusion on medication used for weight loss. The existing provision in the State Plan Amendment (SPA), submitted in 2023, is discriminatory against the chronic disease of obesity. This legislation would remove the unnecessary language – and allow for Maryland Medicaid to retain flexibility in consideration of future obesity treatment coverage.

As the nation’s leading diabetes non-profit organization, treating obesity and preventing type 2 diabetes is a top priority for the ADA. With rates of diabetes and obesity continuing to rise – it is imperative that we address this unrelenting health care crisis. And while obesity has been recognized as a chronic, pervasive, and relapsing disease by the American Medical Association for the last decade, it still carries stigma, blame, and a mischaracterization of being a lifestyle choice.

Obesity is a leading driver of chronic disease and is associated with more than 200 comorbidities, including diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and multiple types of cancer.ⁱ The financial burden of overweight and obesity is equally compelling in supporting comprehensive treatment. In 2016, the estimated economic burden attributable to overweight and obesity in the United States was approximately \$480 billion in direct health care costs and over \$1.2 trillion in indirect costs due to lost productivity.ⁱⁱ **In Maryland, obesity is estimated to reduce economic activity by \$11.2 billion annually.**ⁱⁱⁱ

Moreover, the ADA is gravely concerned about the significant increase of obesity and its compounding impact on diabetes. The most expensive chronic disease in our nation, diagnosed **diabetes costs an estimated \$7 billion in Maryland** each year. ADA’s 2026 Standards of Care recognize that obesity management can delay the progression from prediabetes to type 2 diabetes and is highly beneficial in treating type 2 diabetes. **ADA recommends comprehensive access to and coverage of person-centered obesity treatment and services to urgently address the obesity epidemic.**

Obesity also disproportionately impacts communities of color and rural communities that already face systemic inequities in life and health care. Disparities exist not only in obesity

prevalence, but also in obesity treatment outcomes focused solely on lifestyle interventions, which can be less effective for racial and ethnic minorities. These disparities are not limited to infectious diseases; racial minorities experience higher rates of chronic diseases, death, and disability compared with white Americans.

For these reasons, we support SB 496 and respectfully urge the committee's approval of this critical measure as a first step towards more equitable treatment of obesity.

We would be pleased to provide you with additional information should you have any questions. We look forward to working with your office and being a resource on matters that impact Marylanders with diabetes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Monica Billger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Monica Billger
mbillger@diabetes.org

ⁱ <https://www.ama-assn.org/topics/obesity>

ⁱⁱ Milken Institute. America's obesity crisis: the health and economic cost of excess weight. Published October 2018. Accessed October 8, 2020. <https://milkeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/reports-pdf/Mi-Americas-ObesityCrisis-WEB.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ GlobalData Plc. (2024). *Obesity's impact on Maryland's economy and workforce*.

<https://www.globaldata.com/health-economics/US/Maryland/Obesity-Impact-on-Maryland-Factsheet.pdf>