

Written Testimony of Dr. Elena Rios
President, National Hispanic Health Foundation
In Support of HB1565
“Obesity Management and Treatment Programs (Healthy Maryland for Every Body)”

Maryland House Health Committee
March 13, 2026

Dear Chair Bagnall, Vice-Chair Cullison, and Members of the Health Committee:

My name is Dr. Elena Rios, and I serve as the President of the National Hispanic Health Foundation (NHHF), an organization dedicated to improving the health of Hispanic communities across the United States through evidence-based policy solutions, workforce development, and advancing health equity.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in support of House Bill 1565, legislation that would expand access to evidence-based treatments for obesity and related chronic diseases.

Obesity is a serious chronic disease, recognized by the American Medical Association and other leading medical organizations, that significantly increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, liver disease, and certain cancers. Yet despite the scale of the problem, access to effective treatment remains inconsistent and often inadequate.

Close to 42 percent of U.S. adults live with obesity, and Hispanic communities experience disproportionately high rates of the disease. Hispanic adults experience higher rates of obesity-related chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease, contributing to long-standing health disparities and increased healthcare costs.

For many patients, lifestyle counseling alone is not sufficient. Clinical evidence shows that effective treatment often requires a comprehensive approach that includes behavioral interventions, medications, and in some cases surgical care.

House Bill 1565 would help ensure that patients have access to the full continuum of clinically appropriate treatment options, consistent with modern standards of care.

Recent advances in obesity treatment, including GLP-1 receptor agonist medications, have transformed the medical community’s ability to manage this disease. These medications have demonstrated significant effectiveness in helping patients achieve sustained weight loss and reduce risk factors associated with diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

For patients who have struggled with obesity for years, these treatments can be life changing. However, many patients -- particularly those from underserved communities -- cannot access these therapies due to coverage gaps or cost barriers.

Policies that expand access to obesity treatment can play a critical role in preventing more serious and costly health complications, including heart disease, stroke, and diabetes complications.

Beyond individual health benefits, addressing obesity has significant economic and workforce implications. Chronic diseases linked to obesity are among the leading drivers of healthcare costs in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control, roughly 90 percent of U.S. healthcare spending is associated with people living with chronic and mental health conditions, while analyses from the Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease project that chronic diseases could cost the United States tens of trillions of dollars over the coming decades.

Recent [analysis](#) by Aon also found that broader access to effective obesity treatments, including GLP-1 medications, can generate measurable economic benefits by improving employee health, reducing absenteeism, and lowering long-term medical expenditures for employers and health plans. These findings underscore an important point: investing in prevention and treatment today can reduce long-term costs tomorrow while improving the health and productivity of the workforce.

For Hispanic communities and other underserved populations, access to obesity treatment is often limited by cost, insurance coverage restrictions, and geographic barriers. Expanding coverage for comprehensive obesity care helps ensure that patients are not forced to choose between going without treatment or seeking unsafe alternatives through unregulated sources online. Policies that improve access to clinically supervised care promote patient safety while helping reduce health disparities.

House Bill 1565 represents an important step toward ensuring that patients regardless of income or background have access to medically appropriate treatment for a serious chronic disease. The National Hispanic Health Foundation strongly supports House Bill 1565 because it reflects modern medical science and promotes equitable access to evidence-based care.

By expanding access to comprehensive obesity treatment, this legislation will help improve health outcomes, reduce long-term healthcare costs, and strengthen the health of communities across the state.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Elena Rios, MD, MSPH, MACP
President
National Hispanic Health Foundation