Alliance for Women's Health & Prevention

Obesity Care Should Be Covered Like Any Other Chronic Disease—It's Only Fair

To America's Employers,

Led by the EveryBODY Covered campaign and the Alliance for Women's Health and Prevention, we are writing to ask for your support in ensuring that obesity is covered by your health plans just like any other chronic disease.

For many years, obesity has been **recognized** as a chronic, treatable disease with many causes, including some outside of one's control. Comprehensive obesity coverage should include the full range of **evidence-based obesity care options**, including medical nutrition therapy, intensive behavioral therapy, surgery and FDA-approved medications.

Obesity has a significant impact on women—particularly women of color—across every stage of life.

- The disease is associated with **over 200** serious health complications, such as sleep apnea, heart disease and diabetes, as well as those that especially impact women, such as breast cancer and fertility issues.

- Women living with obesity are often **stigmatized** by coworkers, less likely to be **promoted** and earn as much as **12% less** money than their colleagues.

The status quo must change.

When coverage for obesity care isn't available, patients are left to seek less safe alternatives or forego treatment altogether. Employers are financially impacted when obesity is left untreated— obesity costs employers approximately **$425.5 billion** annually. Covering obesity care also has the **potential** to help lower costs through reduced absenteeism, increased productivity and a healthier workforce.

The EveryBODY Covered campaign encourages employers to prioritize obesity within workplace healthcare and equity strategies by:

1. **Recognizing obesity as a chronic disease with causes that include those outside of an individual's control.** This includes an understanding of the impact the disease has on all aspects of employee well-being, including physical, social and financial considerations.
2. **Reviewing your benefits offerings for opportunities to better support obesity care for your employees and communicate coverage as a priority to your benefits administrators.** Coverage for obesity care that is **comprehensive** should include four pillars: medical nutrition therapy,

intensive behavioral therapy, FDA-approved medications and bariatric surgery.

3. **Working against weight bias at every level of your company and making sure that this is demonstrated through your company's culture.** Some strategies to address **weight stigma** include educating your employees about **weight bias**; using person-first, inclusive language; establishing an employee resource group (ERG); and providing reasonable accommodations for employees living with obesity (e.g., telework and sick leave policies).

Companies have taken varying approaches to providing obesity care coverage for their employees. Best practice recommendations from leading organizations include:

- **Comprehensive Obesity Benefit** and **Checklist** from the Stop Obesity Alliance
- **Employer Recommendations to Address Obesity Coverage** from the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions
- **An Employer's Practical Playbook for Treating Obesity** from the Business Group on Health
- **Modernizing Care for Obesity as a Chronic Disease: A How-To Guide for Employers** from the Milken Institute

We appreciate employers' tireless commitment to advancing employee health and hope you'll answer the call to better support employees living with obesity in the workplace. We would welcome the opportunity to meet and discuss how your company can be a leader in addressing this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Women's Health and Prevention
Aimed Alliance
Alliance for Aging Research
Alliance for Patient Access
Alliance of Sleep Apnea Partners
American Association of Birth Centers
American Association of Nurse Practitioners
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
American College of Physicians
American Kidney Fund
American Medical Women's Association
American Nurses Association
American Psychological Association
American Public Health Association
American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery
American Society of Preventive Cardiology
Association of Black Cardiologists
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses
Arthritis Foundation
BlackDoctor.org

Black Women's Health Imperative
Black Women for Change
Bone Health and Osteoporosis Foundation
Brem Foundation to Defeat Breast Cancer
Caregiver Action Network
Center for Patient Advocacy Leaders
Color of Gastrointestinal Illnesses
ConscienHealth
CHC: Creating Healthier Communities
DiabetesSisters
Diabetes Leadership Council
Diabetes Patient Advocacy Coalition
Gerontological Society of America
Global Liver Institute
GO2 for Lung Cancer
Haven Midwifery Collective
Health Equity Coalition for Chronic Disease
HealthyWomen
Heart Sistas Inc.
MANA, A National Latina Organization
The Mended Hearts, Inc.
National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions
National Association of Hispanic Nurses
National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health
National Black Nurses Association
National Caucus and Center on Black Aging
National Consumers League
National Council on Aging
National Grange
National Hispanic Council on Aging
National Hispanic Health Foundation
National Medical Association
National Menopause Foundation
National Rural Health Association
National Student Nurses' Association
Obesity Action Coalition
Obesity Care Advocacy Network
Obesity Medicine Association
Obesity Medicine Fellowship Council
Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health
Partnership to Fight Chronic Disease
Prevent Cancer Foundation
Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
RetireSafe
Society for Women's Health Research
The Obesity Society
TOUCH, The Black Breast Cancer Alliance
WomenHeart