



STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF Rhode Island HB 6254

Minimum Obesity Coverage Standards

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a more than 85,000 member-strong 501(c)(3) National nonprofit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by the disease of obesity and helping individuals along their journey toward better health through education, advocacy and support. Our core focuses are to raise awareness and improve access to the prevention and treatment of obesity, provide evidence-based education on obesity and its treatments, fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination, elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health and offer a community of support for the individual affected.

OAC strongly supports HB 6254 which would require comprehensive health insurance coverage for obesity treatments in Rhode Island Medicaid. Comprehensive obesity coverage includes prevention and wellness, nutrition counseling, intensive behavioral therapy, FDA-approved obesity medication, and bariatric surgery.

Obesity is a complex, multi-factorial, and chronic disease that requires a comprehensive medical approach to care. It is the second leading preventable cause of death in the U.S., and is associated with a large number of comorbid conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disorders and other largely preventable illnesses. Care should therefore not be seen as simply having the goal of reducing body weight, but should additionally be focused on improving overall health and quality of life. Efforts should be made to both prevent and treat obesity at all stages, and in all age groups. This may include, but is not limited to treatments such as surgery; physician supervised programs; drug, diet and lifestyle interventions; educational programs; and school and community-based programs.

[Rhode Island ranks 40th](#) in states impacted by obesity with 31% of Rhode Island adults living with obesity. Obesity and diabetes disproportionately affect people of color and of lower socioeconomic status which are important factors that often determine access to health care. Persons with low incomes are more likely to be Medicaid recipients or uninsured, have poor-quality health care, and seek health care less often; when they do seek health care, it is more likely to be for an emergency. The total cost of obesity in the United States is \$1.7 Trillion and healthcare costs are 34% higher for people with obesity. Expanding access to obesity care will help decrease the numerous illnesses and comorbidities that plague Rhode Islanders, while improving health outcomes and healthcare savings.



Healthcare coverage for obesity and weight management is inadequate and insufficient, and varies significantly by each plan. OAC believes that health insurance should cover care for obesity as a standard benefit. Insurance should cover the most appropriate and proven treatments to treat the given stage of overweight or obesity. Recognizing obesity as a chronic condition, insurance should also cover necessary long-term follow-up care for obesity treatment. Access to care needs to be both mandatory and reasonable, and should not require undue tests or prerequisites on the part of the patient. Furthermore, obesity is often misunderstood, which contributes to both discrimination and care issues. It is important to educate the public, health professionals, and policy makers about obesity as a disease, the issues impacting individuals affected by obesity and the treatments available to help.

OAC applauds this legislation by increasing access to comprehensive obesity care coverage including prevention and wellness, FDA approved obesity medications, nutrition and behavioral therapy, and bariatric surgery. HB 6254 would ensure that people who are affected by obesity have access to affordable, individualized medical coverage for science-based treatments in the same way other chronic diseases are managed, allowing people to be treated with dignity, respect, and equality that is offered to their peers.

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