



May 20, 2025

Dear Members of House Committee on Finance:

On behalf of the American Diabetes Association (ADA) and the 300,000 thousand Rhode Island residents living with obesity, I am writing in support of House 6254 to ensure comprehensive Medicaid coverage for obesity. I urge you to ensure that our state is doing everything possible to address the obesity epidemic by supporting coverage for obesity treatment and interventions, including FDA-approved weight management medications, nutrition counseling, behavioral therapy, and bariatric surgery.

Obesity is the largest contributor to the chronic disease burden in the United States.¹ Obesity exacerbates or causes over 200 medical disorders including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disorders and other largely preventable illnesses. Obesity-related medical costs in the United States are estimated to be nearly \$173 billion each year. In 2016, the estimated economic burden attributable to overweight and obesity in the United States was \$480.7 billion in direct health care costs and \$1.24 trillion in indirect costs due to lost productivity.²

Moreover, the ADA is gravely concerned about the impact of obesity on diabetes. Obesity accounts for up to 53 % of new cases of diabetes each year in the United States.³ The most expensive chronic disease in our nation, diagnosed diabetes costs an estimated \$1.5 billion in Rhode Island each year. By investing in these treatments, we will be able to potentially save people from the myriad of health complications associated with obesity and offer an opportunity to decrease preventable costs associated with chronic illnesses.

We have come a long way in our understanding of obesity as a chronic illness and that obesity is not just about behavior – there are proven treatments. To minimize obesity's impact on our health and productivity, ADA strongly encourages your support for House Bill 6254. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me at shabbe@diabetes.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Stephen Habbe'.

Stephen Habbe
VP, State Government Affairs

¹Milken 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>

²Milken 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>

³ <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/full/10.1161/JAHA.120.018799>