Clinical and Policy Considerations for Obesity

Scott Kahan, MD, MPH
Director, National Center for Weight & Wellness
Medical Director, Strategies to Overcome and Prevent (STOP) Obesity Alliance
Faculty, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and George Washington University School of Medicine/Public Health
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kahan@gwu.edu
Prevalence of Obesity in US Adults

CDC/NCHS, NHANES 2007-2010.
Obesity Drives >200 Conditions...

Color | GRADE | Strength of evidence
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Red | 4 | Very strong
Teal | 3 | Strong
Green | 2 | Moderate
Blue | 1 | Weak

...And 320,000 Deaths Per Year

Obesity is globally recognised as a chronic disease and health issue. 

“Obesity is a chronic disease, prevalent in both developed and developing countries, and affecting children as well as adults.”

“Obesity is recognised as a chronic clinical condition and is considered to be the result of interactions of genetic, metabolic, environmental, and behavioural factors and is associated with increases in both morbidity and mortality.”

“Overweight and obese people are a majority today in the OECD area. The obesity epidemic continues to spread, and no OECD country has seen a reversal of trends since the epidemic began.”

“Recognizing obesity as a disease will help change the way the medical community tackles this complex issue that affects approximately one in three Americans.”

“…obesity is a primary disease, and the full force of our medical knowledge should be brought to bear on the prevention and treatment of obesity as a primary disease entity…”

“It is important for health care providers to recognize obesity as a disease so preventive measures can be put in place and patients can receive the appropriate treatment.”
Why Is It So Hard To Manage Weight?

Biological Changes Persistently Oppose Weight Loss

Biological Changes Persistently Oppose Weight Loss

The Tobacco Epidemic

Cigarettes per Year


0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000

Initial studies

1st Surgeon General Report

Broadcast Ad Ban

Federal Cigarette Tax Doubles

Medication FDA approved

Nicotine replacement
Framework for Addressing Obesity
CDC Recommendations For Local Governments

Strategies to Promote the Availability of Affordable Healthy Food and Beverages
Strategies to Support Healthy Food and Beverage Choices
Strategy to Encourage Breastfeeding
Strategies to Encourage Physical Activity or Limit Sedentary Activity Among Children and Youth
Strategies to Create Safe Communities That Support Physical Activity
Strategy to Encourage Communities to Organize for Change

EPODE: Ensemble Prevenons L’Obesite Des Enfants
“Together, Let’s Prevent Childhood Obesity”
Current Clinical Practice

Behavioral Counseling in Patients with Obesity and Diabetes

FDA-Approved Medications for Obesity

Bariatric Surgery

Medicare Obesity Policy

• Prior to 2004: Obesity not a disease
• 2004: Obesity is not a disease
• 2006: Bariatric surgery coverage
• 2011: Medical counseling coverage

Medicaid Coverage of Obesity Treatment

**Nutrition:** 6 states cover all obesity-related nutrition counseling codes; 22 states cover none

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**Medicaid Coverage of Obesity-Related Nutrition Counseling Services**

Covers all obesity-related nutritional consult services
Covers some obesity-related nutritional consult services
Covers no obesity-related nutritional consult services
Undetermined/No Data Available

Source: CPT Code Search of Provider Fee Schedules
Note: Common Nutritional Consult Services are defined as CPT codes S9452, 97802-97804, S9470

Medicaid Coverage of Obesity Treatment
Behavioral Counseling: 2 states cover obesity-related behavioral consult CPT codes; 23 states no coverage

Source: CPT Code Search of Provider Fee Schedules
Note: Common Behavioral Consult and Therapy Services are defined as CPT codes 96150-96155, S9499, S9451

Medicaid Coverage of Obesity-Related Behavioral Consult and Therapy Services
Medicaid Coverage of Obesity Treatment Medications: 12 states cover obesity medication, with restrictions; 34 states explicitly exclude it.

Source: State Medicaid Provider Manuals

Medicaid Coverage of Obesity Pharmacotherapy

Medicaid Coverage of Obesity Treatment

Bariatric Surgery: 44 states cover bariatric surgery; 5 states explicitly exclude

Source: State Medicaid Provider Manuals

Medicaid Coverage of Bariatric Surgery

Take-Home Thoughts

• Obesity is a chronic disease and needs to be treated as such
• Clinical obesity treatments work but are underused
• Many opportunities for national and local legislation, regulation, and advocacy
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