The Evolution of Anti-Obesity Medication (AOM) Access

In the past, obesity was considered a lifestyle choice, and access to AOMs was limited[1-3]

Even after the recognition of obesity as a chronic condition, **some AOMs were withdrawn or not approved for long-term use** because the associated risks outweighed the benefits of treatment.[1,4]

Many AOM treatments of the past were **excluded from federal and commercial health plans**, including Medicare Part D; access was very limited.[5,6]

Obesity was **first defined as a disease by the National Institutes of Health in 1998**, followed by the American Obesity Society in 2008, and the American Medical Association in 2013.[7]

FDA-approved AOMs are required to demonstrate both weight-loss efficacy and safety.[8]

Currently, AOMs are more accessible than in the past and are intended for use with lifestyle modification[3,9]

National medical associations[a] agree that obesity is not merely a lifestyle issue, but a serious chronic disease requiring comprehensive treatment[4,10]

The current Endocrine Society Clinical Practice Guidelines from the Pharmacological Management of Obesity emphasize the need to[9]:

- Manage obesity as **a medical condition**
- **Recommend pharmacotherapy** in addition to behavioral modification
- Highlight how AOMs may **amplify adherence to behavior change**

There is significant variability in coverage and reimbursement for AOMs across payers and plans, but currently **49% of private health plans cover AOMs**.[11]

As of 2018, certain US government payers, such as TRICARE, have **expanded coverage and reimbursement** for AOMs.[12,13]

AOMs have been, and remain, **excluded from Medicare Part D coverage**[2]

In response, the **Treat and Reduce Obesity Act** (TROA) has gained sponsors and support since it was proposed and aims to overturn this decision[14,15]

In January 2023, the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) stated that all federal health benefit carriers must[13]:

- Cover a range of AOMs on formulary[b]
- Follow process- and evidence-based utilization management criteria for coverage that are transparent, readily accessible, and follow timelines for standard and expedited reviews

The FEHBP states that the **timely management of obesity may be cost effective**, lower health risks, and help prevent disease progression[13]

[a]American Medical Association (AMA), American Association of Clinical Endocrinology/American College of Endocrinology Obesity Task Force.
[b]As new AOMs are approved by the FDA, carriers should evaluate and update their coverage of AOMs.

Payers and employers **now have a wider range of AOM options** when building holistic health and weight-management programs[8]

Commercial and certain government health plans **have promoted coverage for obesity treatment**, including increased access to AOMs.[6,9,12,13]

A trend of expanded coverage in government healthcare plans and commercial formularies to cover AOMs is growing[16]:

- In Q3 2021, **20 million people** with obesity had coverage for AOMs
  - By Q1 2023, or 18 months later, the coverage of AOMs had **doubled to 40 million people** with obesity
- Commercial lives that have opted in to AOM coverage **increased by approximately 25%** from January 2021 to October 2022, based on the claims approval rate

The FEHBP's guidance has changed over time, including the **recent update regarding the coverage of AOMs**.[13]

Controlling and reducing the prevalence of obesity **may decrease associated healthcare expenditures** through potential improvements in comorbid conditions.[17]

Take action and cover AOMs for your employees or covered lives with obesity

- ☐ Identify your number of members or employees with obesity
- ☐ Understand your plan's or business's current AOM coverage and its integrated approach (opt-in or opt-out)
- ☐ See if your weight-management program meets or exceeds current guideline standards or the new FEHBP standard
- ☐ Customize your plan's approved medication list to include medically managed weight-loss and FDA-approved AOMs
- ☐ Ensure your prior authorization criteria align with label indications for proper utilization management of AOMs
- ☐ Access available tools and resources to demonstrate the potential benefits of covering AOMs in a real-world setting

Please contact your Novo Nordisk Account Manager for further details.

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