

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)

Resolution HHS-22-53

ADDRESSING OBESITY

WHEREAS, the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) has previous policy resolutions recognizing the importance of preventing and reducing obesity, such as AGR-13-15, "ADDRESSING THE OBESITY EPIDEMIC IN AMERICA," HHS-11-19, "SUPPORTING INCREASED ACCESS TO QUALITY NUTRITION AND SUPPORT FOR INFANTS AND CHILDREN," and HHS-10-11, "A RESOLUTION RECOGNIZING THE PREVALENCE OF EXCESS WEIGHT AND OBESITY WITHIN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY, AND ITS IMPACT ON DIABETES AND CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE AND URGING INNOVATIVE AND IMPROVED SOLUTIONS"; and HHS-14-49 "INCREASING ACCESS TO OBESITY TREATMENT OPTIONS;"

WHEREAS, obesity is recognized as a disease by organizations that include the World Health Organization, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the American Medical Association, the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, and the Endocrine Society;

WHEREAS, almost 72 percent of Americans are overweight or obese and certain demographic and socioeconomic groups, including African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and the impoverished are disproportionately affected by obesity;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of Minority Health reports that in 2018, African Americans were 1.3 times more likely to be obese than non-Hispanic Whites, and African American women were 50 percent more likely to be obese than non-Hispanic White women;

WHEREAS, COVID-19 has shined a light on the health inequities experienced by communities of color, as African Americans and Hispanics have been disproportionally affected by the virus;

WHEREAS, obesity has been shown to be the strongest predictor for COVID-19 and is not only associated with severity of disease but also may predispose patients to getting Covid-19;

WHEREAS, according to Science Magazine, hospitalized patients in the US found that of the 17,000 patients hospitalized, 29% were overweight and 48% had obesity;

WHEREAS, according to Science Magazine, obesity negatively influences health outcomes. A meta-analysis of peer-reviewed papers covering 399,000 patients found that people with obesity who contracted COVID-19 were 113% more likely than healthy people to be admitted to the hospital, 74% more likely to end up in the ICU, and 48% more likely to die;

WHEREAS, social determinants of health (SDH) that often impact communities of color also increase the chances that a person will be infected with the novel coronavirus;

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WHEREAS, African Americans are more likely to hold jobs that are considered essential or cannot be done from home, and are more likely to be employed in the service industry (24%) than whites (16%), putting them at risk of exposure if they continue to work in those positions;

WHEREAS, inequities in access to and quality of care lead to poorer health overall and many chronic illnesses, such as diabetes and obesity, that influence their chances of getting COVID-19;

WHEREAS, characteristics of communities in which African Americans often reside may place them at greater risk for developing chronic illnesses, such as lack of affordable and healthy foods or safe places to play or exercise outdoors;

WHEREAS, the Food and Drug Department (FDA) has approved a number of pharmaceuticals as safe and effective for weight management and the treatment of obesity;

WHEREAS, community programs are also critical to addressing obesity in communities, to help those affected lose weight, and make long term healthy habits;

WHEREAS, progress in the development of lifestyle modification therapy, pharmacotherapy, and bariatric surgery has led to new options with improved patient outcomes;

WHEREAS, the Medicare program currently covers obesity screening and counseling and certain bariatric surgery procedures for morbidly obese beneficiaries, but the Medicare law prohibits Part D coverage of prescription drugs to treat obesity; and

WHEREAS, a small number of state Medicaid programs (currently about 16 states) provide some coverage for medications for chronic weight management.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Black Caucus of State Legislators (NBCSL) recognizes that health inequities in communities of color have led to a disproportionate impact of COVID-19 and that states must address the high rates of obesity to improve the health of communities of color and prepare for the next public health epidemic;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NBCSL calls on Congress to eliminate the barriers to coverage of proven FDA-approved anti-obesity medications in the Medicare Part D program;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NBCSL legislators will work within their states to ensure that the full continuum of treatment options, that have been approved by FDA are available through Medicaid programs and state employee health plans;

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the NBCSL further urges additional resources from federal, state, and local governments to support community programs that provide long-term support for lifestyle changes that can reduce obesity and help people maintain their weight loss; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States, the Vice President of the United States, members of the United States House of Representatives and the United States Senate, and other federal and state government officials and agencies as appropriate.

SPONSOR: Representative Ajay Pittman (OK)

Committee of Jurisdiction: Health and Human Services (HHS) Policy Committee

Ratified in Plenary Session: December 2, 2021

Ratification certified by: Representative Billy Mitchell (GA), NBCSL President