

Majority of Americans support strengthening Medicare law to require coverage of obesity programs

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More than two years after the American Medical Association declared obesity a disease, a strong majority of Americans believe Congress should approve legislation to require Medicare to cover FDA-approved medicines to treat obesity.

Sixty-eight percent of Americans believe Medicare should invest in programs to reduce the rate of obesity, according to a national Ipsos poll commissioned by The Gerontological Society of America. The poll also found:

- 89 percent of Americans believe obesity is a problem in their state.
- 71 percent of Americans believe Medicare should expand coverage to include prescription obesity medicines.
- 77 percent were unaware that federal law specifically prohibits Medicare from covering patient costs for prescription obesity medicines.
- 73 percent of Americans were unaware that the FDA has found that current prescription obesity medicines are safe and effective in treating obesity.

Under the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003, Medicare is prohibited from covering prescription obesity medicines. In the 13 years since the legislation passed, however, multiple medicines have been approved as

safe and effective by the FDA.

The Treat and Reduce Obesity Act, which was introduced by Congress last year, would require Medicare to cover prescription obesity medicines. The legislation enjoys significant bipartisan support including 11 cosponsors in the Senate and 125 cosponsors in the House.

"Public policy and society seldom associate obesity with advanced age," said The Gerontological Society of America Executive Director and CEO James Appleby, BSPHarm, MPH. "But recent research has shown that, for those who are over 65 and significantly overweight, the risk of mortality is far greater than it is for younger individuals with excessive body weight. The preponderance of evidence is clear: Obesity at an older age carries with it a plethora of health problems like diabetes and heart disease and the likelihood of premature death"

"Medicare must begin covering medicines to treat obesity because chronic diseases are a primary driver of higher costs in the Medicare system—and, as we know, obesity is a primary cause of chronic disease," former Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson said. "Common sense tells us that if Medicare begins covering these medicines, it would reduce the long term costs associated with [obesity](#)-related chronic diseases."

These are findings from an Ipsos poll conducted Dec. 9 to 15, 2015, on behalf of The Gerontological Society of America. For the survey, a sample of 1,006 adults age 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii was interviewed online in English. The poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, region, race/ethnicity and income.

Provided by The Gerontological Society of America

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