

From: [MICHAEL J GARREN](#)
To: [ETF SMB Board Feedback](#)
Subject: Adding Anti Obesity Medications to State Plans
Date: Monday, January 29, 2024 5:19:36 PM

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Dear GHIB / ETF Members:

My name is Dr. Michael Garren, and I serve as Clinical Professor of Surgery (Division of Minimally Invasive & Bariatric Surgery) at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, with extensive experience treating patients with obesity. I am writing to strongly advocate for the expansion of coverage for anti-obesity medications (AOMs) in our state employee health plans.

Obesity is a pervasive epidemic that continues to escalate, bringing with it a host of serious health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, many types of cancer, depression, immobility, hypertension / pulmonary dysfunction, osteoarthritis, and a myriad of other debilitating, expensive to treat conditions. Despite the tireless efforts of healthcare professionals and the significant strides made in medical treatments, the current approach to managing obesity falls short of addressing the growing needs of our population, including the tens of thousands of Wisconsin state employees who are currently unable to access safe and clinically effective AOMs.

It is increasingly clear that an "all of the above" strategy is essential to effectively combat this crisis. This inclusive approach to care should prioritize long-term public health and wellness, aiming not only to treat obesity but also to prevent the onset of related diseases. By expanding coverage to include AOMs, we can offer a more comprehensive range of treatment options to our patients, aligning with the coverage standards in place in many neighboring Midwestern states (e.g. Iowa, Minnesota, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois), the federal government's employee health plans and even Wisconsin's Medicaid program, all of whom cover AOMs.

The inclusion of these medications in our health plan is not merely a matter of enhancing treatment options; it is a critical step towards bending the healthcare cost curve downwards. The economic burden of obesity and its related conditions is staggering, with increased healthcare spending and lost productivity significantly impacting our state's financial health. By providing access to effective treatments, we can mitigate these costs, improving the quality

of life for our citizens and ensuring a more sustainable future for our healthcare system.

Furthermore, we must strive to offer competitive benefits to our employees and treatment options to our health care practitioners so we can ensure that Wisconsin remains a destination to the best and brightest and a great place to raise a family. It sends a clear message that we are committed to the well-being of our workforce and are prepared to invest in their health.

The status quo is no longer sustainable. The obesity epidemic is intensifying, and without a comprehensive and adaptive approach to treatment, we will continue to see its detrimental effects on our population's health and our healthcare system. As a physician who has witnessed the challenges and struggles faced by patients with obesity, I urge you to consider this proposal seriously.

Expanding coverage for anti-obesity medications is a necessary step in our ongoing efforts to improve public health. It is an investment in the well-being of our state's employees, their families, and the broader community. I am confident that with your support, we can make a significant impact on the obesity epidemic and pave the way for a healthier, more vibrant future for Wisconsin.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your positive response and am available for further discussion on this critical issue.

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael Garren, MD, FACS, FASMBS

Clinical Professor of Surgery

Medical Director- UW Health Metabolic & Bariatric Surgery Program

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February 2, 2024

Michael Garren, MD, FACS, FASMBS
garren@surgery.wisc.edu

Dear Dr. Michael Garren:

Thank you for your email to the Group Insurance Board (Board) regarding adding coverage of anti-obesity medications (AOMs) to the state employee health plans known as the Group Health Insurance Program (GHIP).

The Board will consider 2025 GHIP changes at its February 21, 2024, meeting. The agenda, memos, and presentations for that meeting will be posted on the Department of Employee Trust Funds' (ETF's) "[Group Insurance Board Meeting Agendas and Materials](#)" webpage about a week prior to the meeting.

While ETF staff continues to monitor cost-effectiveness research, the current pricing of these drugs is still greater than the measurable savings. The Board must still adhere to [Wis. Stat. § 40.03\(6\)\(c\)](#) that only allows the Board to add benefits to the GHIP if the addition is mandated by law or if a savings can be demonstrated. If neither of these provisions are met, the Board must reduce benefits to allow for the addition of new benefits.

Recent market data has suggested that weight loss medications account for 1% of annual premium increases for 2024. The Board would either need to reduce \$18M in benefits to accommodate this cost increase, greater savings values would need to be shown in literature, or pharmaceutical companies would need to reduce prices to bring the costs in line with the demonstrated benefits.

Again, thank you for your email. If you have any other questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me using the information below.

Sincerely,

Tricia Sieg, Pharmacy Benefits Program Manager
Office of Strategic Health Policy
Department of Employee Trust Funds

Michael Garren
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