



March 18, 2024

Subject: Urgent Reevaluation of Anti-Obesity Medication Coverage Determination

Dear Group Health Insurance Board,

We proudly represent the labor, policy, and professional interests of tens of thousands dedicated educators and support professionals across Wisconsin who work tirelessly to provide a world class education to approximately 865,000 children in our public schools.

We write today on behalf of our members to express our deep concern and frustration over the current state of discussions regarding the coverage for obesity management within our health benefits plan, specifically coverage for the latest FDA approved anti-obesity medications (AOMs). Obesity is not just a prevalent issue among Wisconsinites; it is a chronic disease that significantly impacts the quality of life and longevity of our members and millions of other Wisconsinites.

The rise in obesity rates correlates strongly with associated dangerous and costly health conditions such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, immobility, and cancer, all of which pose serious long term health risks, contribute to skyrocketing healthcare costs and reduced worker productivity, among other deleterious health and economic affects.

Unfortunately, the Group Insurance Board (GIB) and ETF Staff discussions and deliberations over the past two years have not reflected the gravity of the obesity epidemic nor the urgency in mitigating its effects on state employees, undoubtedly one of the state's most importance assets. In our view, the most recent meeting on February 21, 2024, and the presentations made did not meet the level of rigor, thoroughness, and objectivity required for a matter of such critical importance. In particular, the cost / benefit analysis provided was notably lacking in depth, the overall preparation by the Employee Trust Funds (ETF) staff and its actuarial consultant Segal left much to be desired, as did the ETF Staff's seeming unwillingness to seriously address Board members' and other stakeholders inquiries regarding both the analyses and potential coverage alternatives beyond continued blanket denials.

Our members, who dedicate their lives to serving the State of Wisconsin, rightfully expect and deserve a fair and comprehensive evaluation process when it comes to decisions that could quite literally be a matter of life or death. The current situation, where crucial life changing benefits decisions are postponed or repeatedly inadequately addressed, represents an unacceptable status quo.

Moreover, Wisconsin's Group Health Insurance Program is at risk of becoming an outlier in not including AOM coverage for some or all its members. Our neighboring states including Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan offer anti-obesity medication as a benefit to their public employees, as do numerous other states and the Federal government / Office of Personnel Management's covered plans. Wisconsin's own Medicaid program covers AOMs for its beneficiaries, as do many private and

self-funded employers. Yet despite the emerging consensus, ETF staff continue to inexplicably recommend against all coverage, without providing alternative options for GIB members to consider.

Beyond the public health ramifications, this stance could also potentially imperil Wisconsin's competitiveness as an employer of choice and preferred destination to raise a family, potentially leading highly skilled and qualified employees to contemplate leaving the state in search of competitive benefits that align with the latest clinical research and innovation.

Given the stakes, we are respectfully calling for the GIB **to convene a special meeting prior to its scheduled May 23 meeting**. The purpose in doing so should be to revisit the discussion on the coverage for AOMs with a new, more thorough cost analysis that considers the long-term public health and economic realities as countless other jurisdictions have reached. This analysis must incorporate realistic assumptions and directly and comprehensively address the many questions and concerns previously raised by both GIB members and concerned stakeholders including expert clinicians, covered state employees, patient advocacy organizations and others.

It is imperative that the GIB adopts a forward looking, proactive stance on this issue, engaging in a "yes if" dialogue rather than being constrained by its current binary "yes/no" decision-making framework. Our members, and indeed all those affected by obesity, cannot afford to wait another 1-2 years for the board to be presented with a balanced and objective analysis.

We trust that the GIB will recognize the urgency and seriousness of this request and act swiftly to address the concerns raised. The health and well-being of our members, and their ability to continue serving the state effectively, depend on it.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,



Peggy Wirtz-Olsen
WEAC President



Bob Baxter
WEAC Executive Director