



Congressional Workshop Series: TREATING AND PREVENTING OBESITY – LESSONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT FROM THE PRIVATE MARKETPLACE

BACKGROUND

Obesity is one of the most costly diseases affecting America's adults and children. In fact, it is the single greatest contributing factor to more than 60 other major chronic diseases afflicting Americans today. More than two years ago, Congress enacted health care reform legislation that included a strong focus on prevention and treatment chronic medical conditions – including of obesity.

Recently, there has been broad recognition that, by addressing the obesity epidemic, there is potential for hundreds of billions of dollars in savings in health care spending. In recognition of this, several insurers have taken proactive steps to prevent and reduce obesity in their client bases. While the approaches to treating and preventing obesity differ among the payers, the approach to treating obesity to avoid paying for the conditions associated with obesity is one that the Federal Government – and Medicare and Medicaid in particular – should consider.

Current law allows for Medicare to cover certain interventions for persons with obesity. Specifically, coverage for behavioral interventions for persons with obesity are covered so long as they are provided in the primary care setting as well as surgery in certain instances. While these are positive steps in the right direction, Medicare still lags behind many in the private space in terms of facilitating and incentivizing access to the full array of obesity prevention and treatment options.

This briefing will review the steps taken by the private insurance marketplace, highlight the gaps that exist between those services covered under private insurance and those covered under public plans, as well as identify any lessons the Federal Government can learn from the private payers. From this, participants will discuss what, if any, policy proposals exist to address these gaps and shortcomings.

THE WORKSHOP

The workshop will help Members of Congress and their staffs, as well as key members of the public health community, academia and industry identify policy solutions for improving the prevention and treatment of obesity in the primary care setting. Potential questions to be considered include:

- What is the private payer marketplace doing to combat the obesity epidemic in America?
- What is driving these coverage determinations for the payer marketplace?
- What gaps exist between private and public insurance coverage for the treatment and prevention of obesity?
- How can policymakers address these gaps to ensure access to the full array of obesity prevention and treatment services?

CONCLUSION: What lessons can policymakers learn from and help advance to improve the care, treatment, and prevention of obesity in America?