

February 18, 2025

The Honorable Mike Johnson  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries  
Minority Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Thune  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Johnson, Leader Jeffries, Leader Thune, and Leader Schumer:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we urge you to take action during the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress to address the obesity epidemic. Our organizations represent patients, health professionals, clinicians, researchers, and community-based providers. Clinical obesity across the lifespan continues to be a more serious problem with each passing year, and we have seen the impact that this chronic illness has had on the nation's health, the economy, and our national security. Recent data shows that obesity rates continue to remain steady at record high levels, and with the new developments in treatment, including pharmacotherapy and lifestyle behavioral therapies, we believe that now is the time for Congress to review and address this ongoing crisis.<sup>1</sup>

Obesity affects nearly 42.4% of adults and 19.7% of children in the United States. Over the course of the past three decades, obesity prevalence has drastically increased. According to one study, between 1990 and 2021 the obesity rate doubled in adults to more than 40% and nearly tripled to 29% amongst girls and women aged 15 to 24.<sup>2</sup> More recent data shows that obesity prevalence remains steady with at least one in five adults in every U.S. state living with obesity.<sup>3</sup> As recently defined by the Lancet Diabetes and Endocrinology Commission people with clinical obesity have accompanying organ system dysfunction and/or impaired activities of daily living and really need access to comprehensive treatment.<sup>4</sup> Obesity is associated with an increased risk of developing more than 230 complications including a wide range of diseases and other health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease, liver disease, and kidney disease:

- Nearly nine in ten people living with type 2 diabetes have overweight or obesity.<sup>5</sup>
- People with obesity are also at an increased risk of developing certain types of cancers.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/p0912-adult-obesity.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(24\)01548-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(24)01548-4/fulltext)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2024/p0912-adult-obesity.html>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landia/article/PIIS2213-8587\(24\)00316-4/abstract](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landia/article/PIIS2213-8587(24)00316-4/abstract)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/adult-overweight-obesity/health-risks?dkrd=/health-information/weight-management/health-risks-overweight>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/adult-overweight-obesity/health-risks?dkrd=/health-information/weight-management/health-risks-overweight>

- Obesity significantly increases the risk of developing metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD) and 80% of individuals with MASLD are also living with obesity.<sup>7</sup>
- Numerous studies have demonstrated a link between obesity and a higher risk of chronic kidney disease (CKD).<sup>8</sup>

Obesity has also had an alarming impact on the nation's national security and military recruitment. According to the American Security Project, 68% of active-duty service members are people with obesity and obesity rates amongst active-duty military members have more than doubled between 2012 and 2022.<sup>9</sup> Obesity is the leading disqualifier of military applicants and is also a primary factor to medical discharges and in-service injuries. Meanwhile, obesity has had a negative impact on military recruitment efforts. Just over one in three young adults is too heavy to serve in the military.<sup>10</sup> Only two in five young adults are weight-eligible and adequately active to serve in the military. In 2022, the U.S. Army fell 25% short of its recruitment goal and that number continues to rise. While there are many causes of military recruitment struggles, the military often cites fitness as one of the reasons why recruits are disqualified.<sup>11</sup> Obesity is also costly to our nation's military. The Department of Defense spends roughly \$1.5 billion annually on obesity-related healthcare costs for current and former service members.<sup>12</sup> This includes the costs associated with replacing personnel who do not meet fitness requirements. It has become clear that obesity has become a threat not just to our nation's health but also to our national security.

The economic costs of clinical obesity across the nation are also high. Obesity is estimated to account for \$173 billion in higher medical costs each year, with nationwide productivity costs of obesity-related absenteeism ranging between \$3.38 billion and \$6.38 billion.<sup>13,14</sup> A pre-pandemic study found that the estimated cost of obesity rose from 5.57% of GDP in 2014 to 6.76% of GDP in 2018.<sup>15</sup> The effects of obesity also directly impact productivity and employment. It has been estimated that annual productivity losses across the nation due to obesity-related absenteeism cost between \$3.38 billion and \$6.38 billion. This is between \$79 and \$132 per individual living with obesity.<sup>16</sup> This same study found that people living with obesity were 194% more likely to be absent from work than their colleagues who did not have obesity.<sup>17</sup> The economic

---

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.cell.com/trends/endocrinology-metabolism/fulltext/S1043-2760\(24\)00036-5?\\_returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS1043276024000365%3FshowaIl%3Dtrue](https://www.cell.com/trends/endocrinology-metabolism/fulltext/S1043-2760(24)00036-5?_returnURL=https%3A%2F%2Flinkinghub.elsevier.com%2Fretrieve%2Fpii%2FS1043276024000365%3FshowaIl%3Dtrue)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9675899/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/white-paper-combating-military-obesity/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/resources/unfit-to-serve/index.html>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2022/10/02/army-misses-recruiting-goal-by-15000-soldiers/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity/php/military-readiness/unfit-to-serve.html#:~:text=Obesity%20and%20physical%20inactivity%20are%20costly.basic%20training%20across%20the%20services.>

<sup>13</sup> <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0247307>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5640019/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://milkeninstitute.org/content-hub/news-releases/economic-impact-obesity-increased-14-trillion-says-milken-institute>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/basics/consequences.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3047996/#sec5>

consequences of this epidemic are dire, which is why Congress must act now to address this problem.

We urge you to take action during the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress and address this nationwide public health crisis. We stand ready to work with you either individually or together to address this ongoing problem. Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Rob Goldsmith, Director, Advocacy and Policy at the Endocrine Society at [rgoldsmith@endocrine.org](mailto:rgoldsmith@endocrine.org) who can assist you or direct you to the other organizations. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases  
American College of Physicians  
American Heart Association  
American Medical Association  
American Society of Nephrology  
Endocrine Society  
Society for Women's Health Research  
YMCA of the USA