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GUEST ARTICLE: EXPRESS SCRIPTS



Fighting the Obesity Epidemic Calls for a Multifaceted Approach

Obesity is a chronic, clinical – and more and more common – illness that increases the risk of costly and complex conditions

Many effects of the pandemic are still with us, including an issue made worse by sitting more and moving less: excess weight.

In a recent survey, 61% of adults reported undesired weight changes due to the pandemic, with 40% of those saying they gained an average of 29 pounds. In all, 70% of American adults have been diagnosed with obesity or are considered overweight as indicated by their body mass index (BMI).

Many people who embark on a weight-loss program are simply trying to look and feel better, but for a growing number of obese Americans, the stakes are higher. Obesity is a chronic, clinical illness that increases the risk of costly and complex conditions such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, joint disease and death. In the United States, 20% of medical spending is for obesity-related illnesses[1], and the direct and indirect costs for each patient with comorbidities can exceed \$45,000 a year[2].

To be successful in their weight-loss journeys, patients need the right tools and clinical support. While many people are able to slim down with diet and exercise, weight-loss medications can help those who need additional support.

The GLP-1 receptor agonist drug class was developed for treating type 2 diabetes but has also been shown to be effective for weight loss in patients with obesity, whether or not they have diabetes. These drugs work by targeting areas of the brain that suppress appetite and stomach emptying. One such drug is semaglutide (Wegovy), which was approved in June 2021 for obese individuals and for overweight individuals with a weight-related chronic condition such as high blood pressure or diabetes.

In light of this recent drug approval, it's good for plan sponsors to be aware of these proven tactics to help members lose and keep weight off:

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- Provide dedicated, personalized coaching from appropriate clinicians, whether a primary care provider or a specialized resource, to support patients throughout their journey
- Offer digital tools like:
 - A connected scale that automatically transfers weigh-in data for review
 - Personalized and behavior-based weight-loss programs
 - App-based peer support groups
- For appropriate patients, provide access to medications that could help obese members lose a potential 20% or more of their body weight[3]
- Improve provider access by making available flexible support options such as virtual care through primary-care physicians

By providing weight loss resources to members battling obesity, plan sponsors can see a healthier, more productive workforce and prevent the development of downstream costs as a result of the development of chronic conditions.

See how our solutions can help SGRx Weight Management Care Value

The Weight Management Care Value program delivers a combination of clinically appropriate therapy and tailored support to give patients their best chance of winning the losing battle. Learn about SafeGuardRx Weight Management Care Value

[1] Cawley J, Meyerhoefer C. The medical care costs of obesity: an instrumental variables approach. *Journal of Health Economics*. 31(1):219-230. 2012 [2] America's Obesity Crisis: The Health and Economic Costs of Excess Weight. Milken Institute [3] Wadden TA, Bailey TS, Billings LK, et al. Effect of Subcutaneous Semaglutide vs Placebo as an Adjunct to Intensive Behavioral Therapy on Body Weight in Adults With Overweight or Obesity: The STEP 3 Randomized Clinical Trial. *JAMA*. 2021;325(14):1403–1413. doi:10.1001/jama.2021.1831

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