



OBESITY PLAYBOOK

# Raising the Bar: 6 Ways Employers Can Elevate Their Weight Management Strategy

Employers have long been focused on developing obesity prevention and treatment strategies due to the condition's numerous negative health effects and significant health care costs but never more so than recently. The promise of **GLP-1s**, along with their **challenges**, has ignited a global conversation about obesity, including the many factors that contribute to this complex disease, as well as the **multiple pillars** that must be in place to support the one billion people around the world living with it. As employers have engaged in discussions about the design of benefits and programs to help employees and covered family members achieve clinically significant weight loss, Business Group on Health has supported these conversations by providing resources on the evolving treatment landscape and the practical implications for multinational employers.

In 2023, **28%** of employers reported an increase in medical services due to worsening population health (like higher rates of obesity) as a top impact of the pandemic.

Outlined here are six recommendations for employers to keep in mind as they refine their obesity treatment strategy to align with the best available evidence, meet their population's health needs and balance costs.

Click on the icons for resources on each of these recommendations, which are designed to improve the health, quality and length of life of employees, as well as reduce long-term health care costs for patients and employers alike.



## 1. Address obesity as a complex disease.

Existing and emerging research shows that obesity is a condition driven by a mix of our biology, environment, and behavior. Addressing it through this lens can change obesity treatment paradigms for the better, as well as help reduce societal weight bias.



## 2. Create a strong foundation.

Intensive behavioral interventions, which engage participants in behavior change strategies, are the foundation of all treatments for overweight and obesity. Offering interventions that incorporate the elements necessary for patients to achieve at least 5% weight loss - the threshold at which people can begin to realize health benefits - is a critical building block for a comprehensive strategy.



### 3. Evaluate access to anti-obesity medications.

Many people with overweight and obesity cannot achieve clinically significant weight loss through lifestyle interventions alone. Providing coverage for anti-obesity medications, **including but not limited to GLP-1s**, through thoughtful formulary design that balances access and affordability, is the second pillar of a obesity treatment strategy and can be a useful tool when they are used in conjunction with intensive behavioral interventions to help individuals lose weight and keep it off.



### 4. Revisit your bariatric surgery criteria.

Bariatric surgery is the third pillar of an obesity treatment strategy and may be indicated for patients when other methods for losing weight have been unsuccessful. Reviewing existing criteria with vendor partners and determining potential changes is warranted due to updated eligibility guidelines published in 2022.



### 5. Take your strategy global.

Rates of obesity are rising across the world, creating a call-to-action for multinational employers to develop a global approach. Understanding country and regional specific challenges and nuances, and ways employers can support their workforce in those locations, is a necessary step to developing an impactful and tailored strategy.



### 6. Set employees up for success.

Creating a workplace free from weight bias, encouraging healthy food choices and physical activity while employees are at work, and developing a thoughtful engagement strategy that prioritizes early intervention and treatment adherence, enhances the success of obesity treatments and safeguards investments in weight management programs and benefits.

## Join the Conversation about Obesity Treatment:

- ✓ **Take Part in an Institute:** Join our Institutes, communities of forward-thinking health benefits and well-being professionals - to address shared challenges and opportunities related to overweight and obesity.
- ✓ **Attend the Annual Conference:** Hear from thought leaders on treating obesity with a comprehensive approach.
- ✓ **Chime in on the Employer Community:** Check out discussions about benefits and programs related to the prevention and treatment of obesity and associated conditions among employers in our online forum.
- ✓ **Ask the Business Group for Help:** Use our “Ask a Benefits Question” service to query Business Group staff on pressing topics related to weight management.

## Check Out Our Additional Resources:

- 2024 Large Employer Health Care Strategy Survey
- Survey Findings: Global Weight Management
- Roots of Obesity: The Many Factors that Affect Our Weight and Global Efforts to Influence them for Good
- Obesity: What's Bias Got to Do With It?

1. World Health Organization. World Obesity Day 2022 – Accelerating action to stop obesity. March 4, 2022. <https://www.who.int/news/item/04-03-2022-world-obesity-day-2022-accelerating-action-to-stop-obesity>. Accessed July 21, 2023.