



NATIONAL GRANGE

Elevating rural interests since 1867

1616 H St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20006

September 10, 2024

Dear Chair McMorris Rodgers,

I am writing to you today about the significant public health issue of obesity in rural America. Across our nation, the prevalence of obesity stands at nearly 42 percent according to the CDC. But things are even worse in rural America.

The National Rural Health Association, in collaboration with CDC and the HRSA Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, asked rural clinicians about the greatest challenges for supporting their patients' health. Over 60% identified obesity, as well as the related chronic conditions of Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, as the top 3 challenges to patients' health and access to care.

Research done by NORC at the University of Chicago on obesity in rural America found that obesity is substantially more prevalent among adult rural populations than urban populations, with 48 percent of adults in non-metro areas living with obesity compared to 41 percent in metro areas. Rural residents are also growing older, with 1 in 5 residents now over the age of 65. And those 65 and older are living with obesity at increasing rates.

Because rural residents are more likely to rely on federal programs like Medicare for their health insurance coverage and access to care, the obesity epidemic among older rural Americans is particularly poignant. Medicare currently does not provide access to the full continuum of obesity care because outdated statutory language prohibits coverage of FDA-approved obesity medications.

The Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA), which was first introduced in Congress in 2013, would require Medicare to cover FDA-approved medications for obesity for beneficiaries living with the chronic disease of obesity.

The House Ways and Means Committee, on a strong bipartisan vote, made the first significant step forward on TROA earlier this summer by advancing out of Committee a version of TROA that would allow those aging into Medicare who are on obesity medications to continue to have access to them, rather than fall off a cliff with no access.

I urge you to advance TROA in the House and to send it to the Senate so that TROA can be passed by this Congress.

Thank you for your leadership for all Americans and in particularly for rural Americans like the Grange families in Washington state and across the nation.

Best regards,

Christine E. Hamp, President
National Grange