



Wednesday November 13, 2024

The Honorable Lois Kolkhorst
Texas Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
1100 Congress Avenue
Austin, TX 78701

Dear Chairwoman Kolkhorst and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective as you examine the links between nutrition and chronic disease during today's hearing. I applaud you for making this a priority discussion as you approach the upcoming legislative session.

I write to you in my capacity as Senior Vice President of State Affairs at National Taxpayers Union - the oldest taxpayer advocacy organization in the country, as well as someone who is a former Wisconsin state senator and former pediatric nurse practitioner. My diverse background provides me with a unique view of the problem you are investigating today.

As a taxpayer advocacy organization, NTU has engaged state and federal lawmakers on important questions surrounding the fiscal impact of legislation and regulations on the healthcare space. As a former state lawmaker, I know the challenges you face as legislators as you balance the goal of sound public health policy while being accountable to taxpayers. As a former pediatric nurse practitioner, I have witnessed firsthand the dramatic increase in obesity and chronic illness in our society and am fully aware of the current threats and potential solutions to our nation's health problems.

With that in mind, I hope that your discussions today will consider the gamut of solutions you have identified, including regulatory reforms and other fiscally responsible policies to encourage a healthy food supply, increasing nutritional awareness and both non-pharmacological and pharmacological interventions. Specifically, I would like to take this opportunity to discuss the promise of pharmaceutical innovations and the impact they could have on the citizens of your great state.

Earlier this year, NTU submitted comments to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services on innovative approaches to reduce health care costs. I have attached a copy of our comments which advocate for the thoughtful deployment of prescription drugs in more settings, specifically the use of Anti-Obesity Medications (AOMs). In our comments you will see clear evidence of the prospect of the longer-term economic and fiscal benefits that can occur when people are improving their overall health through the use of AOMs. Estimates published in the [New England Journal of Medicine in 2019](#) projected that 52.9% of Texans would reach an obese condition in 2023. This dangerous and costly trajectory can and should be addressed by all who are concerned with the public health of your citizens.

As you consider possible solutions to this crisis, I urge you to give thoughtful deliberation toward how pharmaceutical innovation can both improve patient outcomes as well as control taxpayer expenditures in government health plan offerings. If judiciously introduced with an eye toward minimizing administrative burdens and managing government's near-term phase-in costs, these medications can offer the promise of greater public and economic health for your state over the long run. As part of a phase-in, you could set limits on a yearly basis for the total amount the state will reimburse, or you could begin with a pilot program limited to the most obese and at-risk patients. As market competition starts to drive down the prices of these drugs, you could always widen their availability as the benefits of reduced comorbidities take hold in the obese community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please reach out with any further questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Leah Vukmir
Senior Vice President of State Affairs
National Taxpayers Union
lvukmir@ntu.org