

# Senate Bill 535 – Obesity Prevention Parity Act

## Senator Laura Richardson

### SUMMARY

SB 535 seeks to reduce obesity and diabetes by requiring health plans to cover the continuum of obesity treatment including medications.

### BACKGROUND

Obesity and diabetes are serious problems. According to the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, one in four adults in California are obese, this translates to 8.4 million<sup>1</sup> people. Obesity is a serious, chronic medical condition with linkages to many of the top causes of death, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer. The costs of obesity are high and growing. Further, according to the American Diabetes Association, approximately 11.7% of adults in California have Type 2 diabetes<sup>2</sup>. People with diabetes have medical expenses approximately 2.6 times higher than those who do not have diabetes.

Obesity is a major risk factor for Type 2 diabetes which can be prevented or delayed with lifestyle changes such as diet and exercise. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to lose the weight needed with basic measures and needs access to medication to help them lose weight.

Like other chronic diseases, obesity treatment requires a continuum of care, including primary and specialist care, antiobesity medications, and surgical interventions.

### EXISTING LAW

Under the Affordable Care Act, health plans are required to provide for essential health benefits. In California, the Knox-Keene Act also requires all health plans and insurers to cover medically necessary basic health care services, including preventive health services. Current law allows plans that provide coverage for outpatient prescription drug benefits to exclude drugs prescribed solely for the purposes of

losing weight, except when medically necessary for the treatment of morbid obesity. [Title 28 CCR §1300.67.24]. Morbid obesity is defined as Class III at 40 BMI or higher.

### THE SOLUTION

SB 535 would reduce the incidence of obesity and diabetes by requiring health plans to include coverage for intensive behavioral therapy for the treatment of obesity, bariatric surgery, and at least one antiobesity medication approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration.

### SUPPORT

Chronic Care Coalition (Sponsor)

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<sup>1</sup> "Overweight and Obesity," UCLA Center for Policy and Research, updated 2025, <https://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/our-work/overweight-and-obesity>

<sup>2</sup> "The Burden of Diabetes in California," American Diabetes Association, updated 2024, [https://diabetes.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/adv\\_2024\\_state\\_fact\\_california.pdf](https://diabetes.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/adv_2024_state_fact_california.pdf)