



The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Leader, US Senate
S-230, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader, US Senate
S-221, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker, US House of Representatives
H-232, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader, US House Representatives
H-204, U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Schumer and Minority Leader McCarthy:

As you may be aware, COVID-19 is having a disproportionate effect on communities of color. While the data are still being collected and analyzed, the CDC reports that 33 percent of hospitalized patients were Black. Due to a variety of factors, Black patients also have the highest prevalence of obesity, at 39.1 percent. The COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened the need to understand and address these disparities.

It is increasingly evident that obesity is an underlying condition and the second greatest risk factor, after older age, for hospitalization among COVID-19 patients. Despite the prevalence and severity of obesity in the United States, especially among the African American population, many public and private health plans, including Medicare, do not adequately cover evidence-based obesity treatment options. We ask that the next COVID-19 relief package incorporates the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (H.R. 1530/S. 595) which would make a significant difference in the survival rate for millions of Americans.

Since 1983, The Black Women's Health Imperative has been the only national organization dedicated solely to improving the health and wellness of our nation's 21 million Black women and girls – physically, emotionally and financially. Women of color, particularly Black women, affected by obesity require access to the same medically necessary and covered treatment avenues afforded to all others who suffer from chronic disease.

A report from the CDC reveals that 78 percent of COVID-19 patients requiring admission to an intensive-care unit (ICU) had at least one underlying health condition, many of which were obesity-related diseases. Data also shows that people with both COVID-19 and obesity are two times more likely to be admitted to the hospital, and people with severe obesity are 3.6 times more likely to require critical care, such as mechanical ventilation. Updating Medicare's coverage policies to support the treatment and prevention of obesity should be part of a comprehensive response to COVID-19.

While Congress and the Administration have taken action to increase access to telehealth, enhance state flexibility under Medicaid, and appropriate funding to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, comprehensive treatment to combat the chronic disease of obesity is still not reimbursed by Medicare or many other health plans. We again ask that you address this significant driver of COVID-19 morbidity and mortality by incorporating TROA (S. 595/HR 1530) into the next COVID-19 relief package.





Please contact Tammy Boyd, tboyd@bwhi.org, should you require additional information from the Black Women's Health Imperative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Linda Goler Blount'.

Linda Goler Blount
President & CEO
Black Women's Health Imperative

CC:

Chairman Chuck Grassley
Ranking Member Ron Wyden
Chairman Richard Neal
Ranking Member Kevin Brady
Chairman Frank Pallone
Ranking Member Greg Walden
Rep. Karen Bass, Congressional Black Caucus Chair
Rep. Joyce Beatty, Congressional Black Caucus First Vice Chair
Rep. Brenda Lawrence, Congressional Black Caucus Second Vice Chair

