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May 18, 2015

The Honorable Erik Paulsen
United States House of Representatives
127 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ron Kind
United States House of Representatives
1502 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Paulsen and Kind:

On behalf of the American Psychological Association (APA) and American Psychological Association Practice Organization (APAPO), we would like to express our support for the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (H.R. 2404), bipartisan legislation to help increase Medicare coverage of obesity treatments, prevent chronic diseases and lower health care costs.

The American Psychological Association is the largest scientific and professional membership organization representing psychology in the United States and the world's largest association of psychologists, with more than 122,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. The APAPO is a companion organization to the APA, and is dedicated to advancing the practice of psychology, and promotes the interests of psychologists who practice in all settings.

We applaud you for introducing legislation in the area of preventative health care for Medicare patients whom are obese and have weight management issues. Obesity is a major national health concern and disease which contributes to the risk of developing other chronic, and often costly, health conditions; including diabetes, depression and heart disease, and can negatively impact an individual's mortality. Psychologists, as key Medicare mental and behavioral health service providers, are experts in the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of health risk behaviors and help fight obesity through behavioral interventions and counseling programs.

The Treat and Reduce Obesity Act would give the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) the authority to expand the provision of the Medicare benefit for Intensive Behavioral Therapy (IBT) for Obesity to additional types of health care providers, including clinical psychologists, physicians who are not primary care physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, registered dietitians or nutrition professionals. As you well know, this Medicare preventative care service is generally limited now to primary care physicians. Psychologists are well positioned to promote health behavior change, and the inclusion of psychologists in this Medicare benefit is a welcomed supplement.

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Additionally, your legislation would allow CMS to expand Medicare Part D to provide coverage of FDA-approved prescription drugs for chronic weight management, and require the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to report back to Congress on steps taken to implement the Act and to provide Congress with recommendations for better coordination of federal government efforts on obesity.

APA and APAPO share your vision in improving the health of obese and overweight Medicare beneficiaries, and are committed to expanding psychology's role in advancing a patient's overall health and promoting health behavior change.

Thank you for your leadership on this important initiative. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to enact the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine C. Nordal Ph.D." in a cursive script.

Katherine C. Nordal, Ph.D.
Executive Director for Professional Practice

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gwendolyn Puryear Keita" in a cursive script.

Gwendolyn Puryear Keita, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Public Interest Directorate