

Novo Nordisk: Shifting Harmful Norms around Obesity

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COMPANY DESCRIPTION

Founded in 1923, Novo Nordisk is a global health care company with U.S. headquarters in Plainsboro, New Jersey. Novo Nordisk treatments are marketed in more than 170 countries and the company generated 49 billion Danish kroner in operating profit in 2017¹. Building on a Triple Bottom Line framework and a heritage as a leader in diabetes care, Novo Nordisk has a long-term commitment to improving the lives of people with obesity and strives to transform how we view and treat this serious, chronic and progressive disease.



THE OPPORTUNITY

Society glamorizes weight loss, but the opportunity to transform care will be grounded in weight management. What most people may not realize is that obesity is not a life choice or simply about willpower. Every day across America, people living with obesity are met with prejudice, discrimination and a lack of empathy. Help is hard to find, as there are few health care professionals trained in obesity management and patients see their weight as something they should be able to solve on their own. But science now shows what many of us have long suspected: after losing weight, your body keeps trying to put it back on. And after weight loss, your metabolism actually slows down, and appetite signals increase.

The United States has one of the world's highest obesity rates in the world, with more than 95 million adults and 12 million children, or roughly four in 10 Americans² affected, but very few are partnering with a health care professional to "actively manage*" their disease.^{3,4} Unfortunately, obesity tends to be misunderstood by all stakeholders, from the general public to health care professionals, payers and policymakers. Evidence shows that effective weight management strategies should include behavior

*Actively managed: A health care professional has diagnosed a person (who has a body mass index of 30 or more) as having obesity, has discussed it, and is attempting to manage weight through lifestyle modification, drug therapy or surgery.

¹ Figures based on 2017 [Financial Statement](#). (1 DKK. 0.153061 USD on November 6, 2018)

² Obesity and overweight. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/obesity-overweight.htm> Updated June 13, 2016. Accessed November 06, 2018.

³ Obesity and overweight. World Health Organization website. <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obesity-and-overweight> Updated February 16, 2018. Accessed November 06, 2018.

⁴ Kaplan LM, Golden A, Jinnett K, et al. Perceptions of Barriers to Effective Obesity Care: Results from the National ACTION Study. Obesity. 2017. doi:10.1002/oby.22054.

change and support, increased physical activity and meal planning, as well as pharmacotherapy, and/or other medical interventions, like surgery.

When it comes to funding for care and coverage of obesity solutions, there have been some improvements relating to lifestyle modifications and surgery, however, under current law, Medicare prohibits coverage of “weight-loss” medications, and Medicaid coverage remains limited. Today, employers decide on obesity prescription coverage, and significant unmet needs remain. Leading medical organizations officially classify obesity as a disease but many health care professionals do not address it until related conditions, such as type 2 diabetes or cardiovascular disease, arise. Greater health and economic challenges are guaranteed if this continues – The Milken Institute found the total US costs for the treatment of health conditions related to obesity totaled \$1.72 trillion⁵ annually, including medical and indirect economic costs.

“Our long-term commitment is to improve the lives of people with obesity by partnering with the community on education and advocacy, increasing access to care, and advancing medical management. I am excited that Novo Nordisk is collaborating to transform how the world views and treats this serious, chronic and progressive disease.”

– BLANDINE LACROIX, Corporate Vice President, Obesity, Novo Nordisk Inc.

THE STRATEGY

With more than 90 years of driving change for people living with chronic diseases and a mission to discover, develop, and deliver better medicines, Novo Nordisk is well placed to transform treatment for people living with obesity, guided by rich insights and taking the time to recognize that this can only be achieved by acknowledging that mindsets do not change overnight. Rather, it’s about fostering ecosystems of change, facilitating solutions, connecting care partners and collaborating on ways to make care happen.

Novo Nordisk has an ambitious strategy and plan in place – working closely with the community to change mindsets in order to:



- understand and embrace chronic weight management;
- break down barriers to care;
- and help increase the number of physicians motivated to treat and patients seeking medical help.

Creating a sense of urgency and movement towards improved obesity care is key, plus working with partners to provide evidence that obesity care works to enable the healthcare system to prepare to make care widely available.

The company has spent more than two decades advancing global obesity research independently and in partnership with universities and biotech companies. Its dedicated U.S. research centers identify new approaches for obesity treatment, increase the scientific understanding of existing obesity targets - and have made considerable progress. The company released its first FDA-approved treatment for chronic

⁵ Waters H, Graf M. America’s Obesity Crisis: The Health and Economic Costs of Excess Weight; 2018. <https://www.milkeninstitute.org/publications/view/944>. Updated Oct 26, 2018. Accessed Nov 06, 2018.

weight management in 2015 and has several new classes of drugs in clinical development, including combination therapies.

In speaking with scientific organizations, it became apparent that there was a significant gap in knowledge and standardized care when it came to obesity management. Through an educational grant from Novo Nordisk and support from the American Board of Obesity Medicine, The Obesity Society established the [Obesity Medicine Fellowship Development Program](#): a new, collaborative effort to increase the number of physicians with specialized training in the care and treatment of patients with obesity and its complications.

By gaining patient insights into the challenges that influence individual treatment decisions, it also became clear to Novo Nordisk that change needed to happen on multiple societal levels, including federal policies, quashing weight stigmatization and reforming social norms that promote obesity as a personal failing. Novo Nordisk is joining forces with several organizations to drive acceptance of and action around obesity as a disease, which could improve patient access to medical support, increase funding and coverage of tools and medications, alter public discourse around blame and bias, and encourage the US health care system to deal with the social, environmental, and systemic causes of excess weight that may negatively impact health, mobility and/or quality of life.



By better understanding patient, health care professional, and employer experiences in managing obesity, Novo Nordisk can continue improving education, treatment resources and comprehensive care on two shared value dimensions:

Reconceiving products and markets Novo Nordisk has an industry-leading obesity treatment pipeline, with the first treatment for chronic weight management on the market and several new classes in development.

Creating local health clusters Novo Nordisk is creating strategic partnerships to elevate obesity to be a mainstream health care priority and to improve sustainable obesity awareness, education and treatment.

RESULTS – VALUE FOR BUSINESS AND SOCIETY

Novo Nordisk is collaborating with partners to shift the mindset around obesity, engage and educate health care professionals, employers, patients and the general public, and advocate for access to obesity tools and treatments – long-term ambitions. Measurable outcomes in generating social and business returns include:

- Facilitating **national conversations to advance the science of obesity, reduce weight bias associated with the disease, and ensure comprehensive care** for people affected by obesity:
 - [National Obesity Care Week \(NOCW\)](#) is a public awareness effort aiming to create a society that understands, respects and accepts the complexities of obesity and values evidence-based care. Last year, the US Senate passed a resolution supporting National Obesity Care Week. Novo Nordisk Inc. is the proud founding partner and platinum sponsor.
 - The obesity-community led, Novo Nordisk-sponsored “**A**wareness, **C**are and **T**reatment In **O**besity **M**anagement” ([ACTION](#)) Study, published in the journal *Obesity*, was the first US nationwide study to investigate the *what* and *why* behind barriers to obesity care from the perspectives of employers/payers, health care providers and people with obesity.
 - The [Weight of the World](#) initiative is an online video and storytelling project to ‘drive change through the power of the personal story’. Launched by the [Obesity Action Coalition](#) (OAC)

and supported by Novo Nordisk, it aims to increase awareness and address issues such as stigma and bias.

- [Truth about Weight®](#) is a patient-facing resource developed by Novo Nordisk to help patients prepare for conversations with health care providers, providing the science behind weight loss and tools to help assess weight management history, motivations, and triggers.
- **Connecting people and professional associations to work together to accelerate care** and investing in **education** to increase the number of professionals focusing on obesity and starting a conversation about weight.
 - [ObesityCareProviders.com](#), a health care provider database developed by the OAC, based on an identified need to help patients in need of care locate health care providers who treat obesity. Launched in June 2018, the OAC created this site through a grant by Novo Nordisk Inc.
 - [Strategies to Overcome and Prevent \(STOP\) Obesity Alliance](#) brings together consumers, health insurers, government bodies and businesses—including sponsor Novo Nordisk—to create innovative strategies that prevent gaps in obesity management.
 - In order to bring resources to health care professionals, [Rethink Obesity®](#) was developed by Novo Nordisk to help health care professionals support patient weight-loss and management goals and provide comprehensive materials, tools and tips.
- Educating and influencing to **expand funding for care and coverage for medications**, and continuing to strengthen an innovative approach to work with payers and employers in the complex US reimbursement structure. For example, outcomes-based evidence and health economic data supporting the benefits of obesity treatments will be critical to convincing payers they are worth investing in.
 - The [Treat and Reduce Obesity Act Coalition](#) was formed by Novo Nordisk and leading patient and health care professional groups to expand available obesity treatment options under Medicare. Novo Nordisk is also an original member of the [Obesity Care Advocacy Network](#), created to elevate obesity on the national political legislative agenda.
 - Novo Nordisk joined forces with the Bipartisan Policy Center and a collaborative of health care leaders across the nation on the [“My Healthy Weight”](#) pledge to offer individuals consistent coverage to support long-term weight management and improve health.
 - Developed by Novo Nordisk to help employers understand the value of chronic weight management in the workplace, [Novo Nordisk WORKS™](#) provides resources to help organizations improve employee health and decrease health-related costs.



LESSONS LEARNED, CHALLENGES AND OUTLOOK

Novo Nordisk continues to be dedicated to **driving scientific progress** in this disease area and is identifying and **developing new treatment options** for people with obesity. With one anti-obesity product already on the market, Novo Nordisk has a rich pipeline of treatments in development. The company has encountered roadblocks along the way, some that have inspired great innovations and others that require a thoughtful approach and long-term commitments to change:

- **Move from words to actions:** the **most fundamental lesson** for Novo Nordisk was realizing that a mindset of acute weight loss, rather than an understanding of chronic weight management, underpins the beliefs and actions of stakeholders in the obesity ecosystem. Saying you believe obesity is a disease doesn't automatically mean your belief system or actions change too. As a result, Novo Nordisk understood that **to change perceptions about obesity requires a long-term approach**. Strong partnerships are critical to creating shared value. Employers hold the key to coverage, and creating real world evidence will be key to driving change.
- **Balance short and long-term goals:** Novo Nordisk is continuously working to **adapt to current market dynamics and redefine its business model** for the long-term while facing short-term expectations. Novo Nordisk has adopted a collaborative, entrepreneurial approach, with the ultimate aim of fostering a sustainable market that demonstrates the value of obesity management to all stakeholders. The company is always open to exploring new partnerships.
- **Start from scratch and challenge the status quo:** as a traditionally diabetes-focused business, Novo Nordisk is learning to **embrace obesity as a separate challenge**. A stand-alone Obesity Business Unit empowers Novo Nordisk to make long-term, strategic business decisions that shape the future of obesity care and the business. This mandate gives the company an edge in a space few pharmaceutical competitors are willing to dive into, given the expenses and risks involved in the uncharted market. It is exciting to think that Novo Nordisk's efforts, in collaboration with the community, could lead to a paradigm shift in the treatment of obesity in the U.S.

Novo Nordisk's Triple Bottom Line framework and focus on shared value ensures the company considers how all actions may impact people, communities and the environment – while doing what is best for the patient, and remaining fiscally responsible. With that in mind, Novo Nordisk has recognized the unmet public health needs of people living with obesity and established a long-term, sustainable ambition to break through the barriers currently preventing effective obesity care in the U.S.