
ITIF | INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION FOUNDATION
CENTER FOR LIFE SCIENCES INNOVATION

A Shot at a Healthier Future: The Transformative Potential of GLP-1s

SANDRA BARBOSU AND NATALIE KHOO | AUGUST 2025

Obesity affects over 42 percent of U.S. adults, costing the nation more than $400 billion annually. Traditional weight-loss methods alone have proved to be insufficient in addressing this growing public health burden. But GLP-1 receptor agonists now offer the potential to profoundly transform obesity care. Public policies should support their wider adoption.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Obesity costs the United States more than $400 billion annually, including $173 billion in health-care expenditures, as well as significant losses in productivity, wages, and economic output.
- The indirect costs of obesity ripple across multiple sectors—including transportation, food, infrastructure, and emergency services—further compounding its overall economic burden.
- Prior efforts to reduce the obesity crisis through advice about dieting and exercise have failed.
- GLP-1 therapies deliver clinically meaningful weight loss and help reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other chronic conditions.
- Broad adoption of GLP-1 therapies could reduce long-term health care costs, boost labor force participation, and generate economic benefits across multiple sectors.
- Key policy priorities include continued support for GLP-1 research, equitable access to these therapies, and incorporating dynamic scoring in CBO modeling to better capture the broader economic impact of obesity reduction.

A Shot at a Healthier Future: The Transformative Potential of GLP-1s

Sandra Barbosu, PhD

Associate Director, Center for Life Sciences Innovation, ITIF

February 5, 2026

ITIF | INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION FOUNDATION

@ITIFdc

Why Obesity Matters

Major public health challenge and economic strain:

- 42% of U.S. adults are obese.
- Obesity raises risk of diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer.
- Obesity costs exceed $450 billion annually.

Cost	Total (billion $)
Direct Medical Costs	$173.0
Workers' Compensation Program	$5.2
Disability Costs	$31.1
Absenteeism	$82.3
Presenteeism	$160.3
Aviation Fuel Costs	$0.7
Total Costs	$452.6

The Opportunity: GLP-1 Receptor Agonists



- Traditional approaches (diet, exercise) rarely sustain weight loss; earlier drugs limited by efficacy and safety concerns.
- GLP-1s originally developed for type 2 diabetes.
  - Eli Lilly's Mounjaro/Zepbound; Novo Nordisk's Ozempic/Wegovy.
- Regulate appetite and metabolism – 15% average weight loss.
- Benefits beyond weight loss: cardiovascular, cognitive, behavioral.

→ Paradigm shift in obesity treatment.

Economic Implications: Healthcare Spending

GLP-1s can reduce long-term healthcare costs:

- Lower obesity-related and metabolic disease burden.
- Fewer hospitalizations, shorter stays, fewer complications.
- U.S. evidence: ~20% reduction in hospital admissions among patients with type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.
- UK study: GLP-1s integrated into diabetes care could prevent 171,000 hospitalizations; >$2B in savings by 2040.

Economic Implications: Labor Market & Spillovers

Health and economic growth are tightly linked.

- Obesity-related illness estimated to reduce per capita economic output by roughly 3 percent.
- GLP-1s could raise workforce participation and output, as healthier populations can work longer and boost productivity.
- Obesity costs spill into other sectors (public infrastructure, transportation, emergency services, military readiness).

→ GLP-1 benefits extend well beyond healthcare.

Challenges to Address

Key barriers to realizing GLP-1 potential:

- **Adherence:** More convenient delivery (oral, needle-free) to enhance patient comfort and compliance.
- **Access:** Prioritize patients with highest medical need.
- **Affordability:** Follow-on competition can help reduce prices.
- **Complementary care:** Lifestyle and behavioral support alongside GLP-1s.

Policy Takeaways



Unlock the full health and economic benefits of GLP-1s:

- Support basic & translational research to sustain next-generation GLP-1 innovation.
- Incorporate dynamic scoring in CBO analyses to capture economy-wide impacts.

Conclusion: A Transformative Opportunity

- Obesity is a major health and economic challenge.
- GLP-1s offer a rare opportunity to improve population health and economic performance.
- Realizing this potential requires coordinated policy action.

Thank You!

Sandra Barbosu, PhD

Associate Director, Center for Life Sciences Innovation, ITIF

sbarbosu@itif.org | @sandra_barbosu