

Social Determinants of Health and the Use of Prescription Weight-Management Medications: Evidence from a Survey of U.S. Adult Consumers

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Obesity is a chronic disease and a significant risk factor for numerous conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and several forms of cancer. Beyond its health consequences, obesity places a substantial economic burden on the U.S. healthcare system through increased medical costs, long-term disease management, and reduced workforce productivity. Despite decades of public health efforts, obesity remains a persistent concern. The recent introduction of novel pharmacological weight-loss treatments represents a marked shift in obesity management, with consistent use associated with an average weight reduction of approximately 15%. As demand for these medications grows, their high cost, inconsistent insurance coverage, and evolving public perception place them at the intersection of healthcare affordability, consumer behavior, and social equity. While these treatments mark a significant clinical advancement, access and sustained use remain uneven. Given the historical stigmatization of obesity, this study applies a Social Determinants of Health (SoDH) framework to examine how social and economic factors, such as income, race, education, and gender, influence the uptake and use of new obesity medications across demographic groups. Using data from the 2025 International Food Information Council (IFIC) Food & Health Survey, this study examines utilization patterns among three groups -- current users, potential users, and those who would never consider such medications -- based on their socioeconomic characteristics, obesity status, and environmental context. By situating obesity treatment within broader social and economic structures, this study assesses how pharmaceutical interventions may shape healthcare resource distribution and reinforce or mitigate existing disparities. Findings aim to inform conversations on fair access, policy development, and the role of consumer economics in shaping future obesity treatment strategies.

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