



American Security Project

April 24, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin, III

United States Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin,

The obesity epidemic poses an existential threat to our national defense. Our Armed Forces face their largest recruitment crisis since the initiation of the all-volunteer force, and failure to meet body composition standards has led to disqualifications of military applicants since 2014. Despite loosening fitness standards, the pool of eligible military recruits is shrinking rapidly as overweight and obesity rates surpass 57% of adults under 25.

This crisis has far-reaching impacts on readiness and retention. Overweight and obesity within the active and reserve components have reached unprecedented levels: among active-duty service members, 21% have obesity and two-thirds are clinically overweight. Musculoskeletal injuries, heart disease, type II diabetes, liver disease, and other comorbid conditions are rising in tandem with body composition trends.

Despite incredible leaps in medical and nutrition science, obesity and its comorbid conditions in the U.S. Armed Forces remain heavily stigmatized and underprioritized. The Department of Defense must take decisive action to rectify systemic issues preventing individuals with obesity from accessing evidence-based treatments including behavioral therapy, anti-obesity medications, and bariatric surgery.

The American Security Project and the following signatories are advocating for the following:

- A full review of obesity identification and treatment guidelines within the Department of Defense, including statistics on treatment approvals, denials, and appeals for existing treatment options.
- System-wide recognition of obesity as a chronic disease that can be treated while in service, provided the performance standards required within their role are met.
- Cost-effective, comprehensive policies for obesity prevention that preserve service members' long-term health and, within combat arms occupational specialties, maximize combat effectiveness.
- Effective early interventions for overweight and obesity for all other service members, including those in the reserve and national guard components.
- Greater access to credentialed food and nutrition practitioners and the full continuum of evidence-based obesity treatments in consultation with medical professionals.

U.S. military personnel are our most critical national security asset and deserve our utmost care and respect. We must act decisively and unwaveringly to safeguard their health and restore the readiness of our military.

Respectfully,

American Security Project

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Washington, DC 20004

American Veterans

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Lanham, MD 20706

The Obesity Society

9211 Corporate Blvd, Ste. 300
Rockville, MD 20850

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National Security Leaders for America
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Obesity Action Coalition
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Tampa, FL 33614

The American College of National Security Leaders
2700 Virginia Ave NW,
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Obesity Medicine Association
7173 Havana St #600-130
Centennial, CO 80112

Alliance for Women's Health and Prevention
WomensHealthandPrevention.org
(202) 957-3200

African American Wellness Project
1 P Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

Alliance for Patient Access
2020 K Street NW, Suite 505
Washington, DC 20006

Partnership to Advance Cardiovascular Health
2020 K Street NW, Suite 505
Washington, D.C. 20006

Gerontological Society of America
1101 14th Street NW, Suite 1220
Washington, DC 20005

Obesity Care Advocacy Network
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Washington, DC 20037

Global Liver Institute
info@globalliver.org
(800) 845-5910

Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness
950 New Hampshire Ave NW #2,
Washington, DC 20037

YMCA of the USA
101 N Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606

Choose Healthy Life
choosehealthylife.org
nmansour@choosehealthylife.org

National Hispanic Medical Association
1920 L St NW #200,
Washington, DC 20036

WomenHeart: The National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease
712 H Street, NE Ste. 2201,
Washington, DC 20002

The Endocrine Society
2055 L Street NW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20036

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
1120 Connecticut Ave NW 460,
Washington, DC 20036

American Society for Nutrition
9211 Corporate Blvd, Suite 300
Rockville, MD 20850

HealthyWomen
P.O. Box 336
Middletown, NJ 07748

American Diabetes Association
2451 Crystal Drive, Suite 900
Arlington, VA 22202

The Mended Hearts, Inc.
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Leesburg, GA 31763 USA

National Hispanic Health Foundation
1216 5th Ave,
New York, NY 10029

Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A.
1811 R Street NW
Washington, DC 20009

WeightWatchers
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New York, New York, 10010

And the Following Individual Signatories,

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United States Marine Corps, Retired
Former Chief of Staff, U.S. Central Command
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Former Commander, Navy Region Southwest

Member, Consensus for American Security

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U.S. Representative, Virginia 8th Congressional District

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