

**Weight Loss Drugs: From a Medical Breakthrough to Social Media Obsession**

Caidence I. Brock

York College of Pennsylvania

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Professor John Paul Capresecco

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## **Executive Summary**

Weight loss drugs like Ozempic, Wegovy, and Zepbound originally began as real medical treatments meant to help people with Type 2 diabetes manage their blood sugar and lower their health risks. Lately, these drugs have turned into something much bigger and not in a positive way. The popularity of these medications have led to social media trends where influencers and celebrities are showing off their new “Ozempic weight loss,” which now has shifted the medication from its original use. The hype surrounding this drug has resulted in increased prices, shortages, and sometimes misuse. While these drugs can be effective and safe when used correctly, the financial and social media sides of the story reveal the more complicated reality regarding the misuse of this drug. This white paper looks at the change of these drugs, their impact, and how medical and public perceptions could be clearer.

## **Introduction**

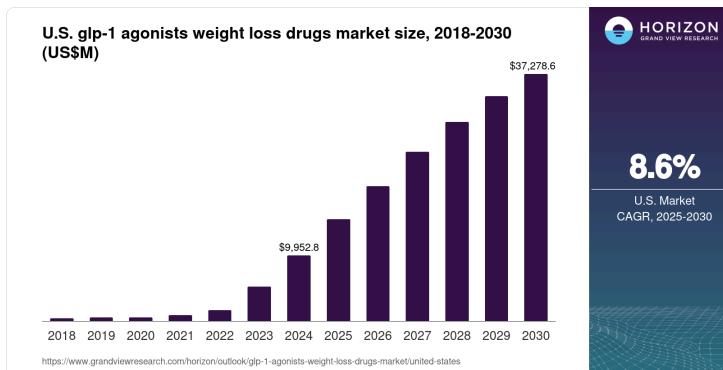
In the past few years, drugs like Wegovy and Ozempic have become extremely popular for weight loss. Originally, they were meant for people with Type 2 diabetes, not for those who just wanted or needed to drop a few pounds. These medications contain semaglutide, which helps with a patient's blood sugar and appetite. However, once people realized it would cause weight loss, it spread online like crazy. The drug spread to Instagram, Tiktok and even news outlets who then made these drugs the symbol of “effortless weight loss.” As a result, individuals without medical needs began seeking these medications, which led to supply shortages, increased costs, and widespread confusion regarding their safety.

## Background and History

Wegovy, Ozempic, and Zepbound, contain semaglutide and tirzepatide, which were first made to help manage diabetes. As reported by the Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter (2024), these GLP-1 receptor agonists help in controlling blood sugar, appetite, and digestion. When doctors observed weight loss in diabetic patients using these medications, pharmaceutical companies created versions aimed at weight loss completely.

In the beginning, this appeared beneficial for individuals struggling with obesity, allowing them to lose weight “safely.” However, as social media began to promote “Ozempic bodies,” the drug's image shifted.

A report from JAMA by Ruder (2025) showed that as the demand for Ozempic grew higher, many people resorted to unregulated compound versions of the drug, some of which became safety risks. This statement highlights how easily something designed for health can be distorted by social trends and profit motives.



Growth of GLP-1 Weight Loss Drug Market in the United States (Google Images, 2025)

## Stakeholders and Viewpoints

There are several groups affected by this issue:

- **Pharmaceutical Companies:** They benefit from big profits but then face backlash over high prices and a limited supply
- **Healthcare Providers:** Doctors see both the misuse and the benefits with many now warning patients not to use the unapproved versions.
- **Patients with Diabetes:** Individuals with diabetes seem to be struggling the most. The drug shortages have made it almost impossible for them to get the medication they need for their survival.
- **The General Public:** Social media users and influencers shape the perceptions about this drug, typically spreading unreliable information or unrealistic weight loss expectations.
- **Insurance and Policy Makers:** According to Formulary Watch (Myshko, 2025), the costs of covering GLP-1 drugs could break healthcare budgets if everyone eligible used them.

## Current State of the Issue

The current situation around these drugs is complicated. These drugs really do work, studies show they lead to significant weight loss and even reduce cardiovascular risk (Myshko, 2025). However, they're also very expensive, hard to access, and not intended for a quick cosmetic fix.

The Institute for Clinical and Economic Review (ICER) found that while the drugs are cost-effective from a medical standpoint, the overall demand may exceed what the healthcare

system can afford. In other words, they help people, but not everyone realistically can have them. (Myshko, 2025)

There's also concerns about side effects. The Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter (2024) reports that while serious problems like pancreatitis or bowel obstructions are rare, common issues such as nausea, vomiting, and constipation are very common. And because many new users are not diabetic, there's still limited research on long term safety and side effects for non-diabetic users.

Social media has made things much worse. The Alcoholism & Drug Abuse Weekly (2024) article described how these same GLP-1 drugs are now even being studied for conditions like alcohol use disorder, showing that their uses are growing fast. This might sound like a good thing, but it also raises questions about whether we're using them responsibly or just looking for another "miracle fix" as well as this revelation becoming the new hit.

## Research Summary

Across these five sources, similar themes appeared. These drugs are big, yes, but they're also being overused for something that is still very **new**.

- **Medical Benefits:** Clinical data confirms that GLP-1 drugs effectively lower blood sugar, lower risk of heart disease, and improve metabolic function.
- **Side Effects:** Common side effects include gastrointestinal distress, nausea, and occasional gallbladder or pancreas issues (Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter, 2024).

- **Economic Impact:** Only about 1% of eligible patients could be treated before hitting ICER's annual budget threshold (Myshko, 2025). That means even though they work, the cost isn't sustainable.
- **Social Trends:** Influencers and celebrities create unrealistic expectations, turning what originally was a serious medication into a viral trend (Ruder, 2025).
- **Ethical Concerns:** Diabetic patients are facing shortages and higher prices because people without medical needs are taking the drugs.

## Recommendations

If these drugs are going to stay in use, which at this rate is a guarantee, they need to be used **responsibly**.

1. **Stronger Regulations:** The FDA should restrict compounded or unapproved versions that may be unsafe (Ruder, 2025).
2. **Educating the Public:** Clear communication regarding the drugs' original use is necessary. Weight loss drugs are not a quick fix, and they don't replace lifestyle changes (Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter, 2024)
3. **Insurance:** Policy changes should prioritize access for diabetic and high risk patients before extending the availability to non-diabetic individuals.
4. **Monitoring Medical Prescriptions:** These drugs should always be prescribed with a plan for a follow up and not the just "try it and see" approach when using these drugs.

5. **Social Media Awareness:** Social Media platforms like TikTok and Instagram should require disclaimers when promoting or discussing medical drugs to reduce misinformation.

## Conclusion

Weight loss medications like Ozempic and Wegovy show both a medical discovery and a case of how much social media can impact society. These drugs have helped thousands of people manage diabetes and obesity, but they've also shown how quickly society can take a medical discovery and turn it into a trend. What originally started as a breakthrough turned into extreme marketing. For the future, we need to bring back a balance between who can have access to this drug as well as who is allowed to promote it. This way it can keep the medical benefits while also protecting patients, having accurate information, and promoting fairness.

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