

**Obesity: The Leading Cause of Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease and the
Most Urgent Threat to Public Health Today**

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8:30 AM to 10:00 AM

U.S. Capitol Building, Room SC-4

Welcome and Opening Remarks:

Lorraine Stiehl, Chief Executive Officer, American Liver Foundation

Good morning and welcome to the American Liver Foundation's Congressional Briefing: **Obesity: The Leading Cause of Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease and the Most Urgent Threat to Public Health Today.** I'm Lorraine Stiehl, CEO of American Liver Foundation and I am thrilled to be here today to talk to you about a disease that affects 1 in 3 people in the United States—a disease we have the tools to confront and conquer. We are grateful to Senator Shaheen and her office for helping us arrange today's important discussion, and for her continued concern for and support of liver health.

Today, we're here to shed light on Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD). However, I want to mention that recently, leading liver medical societies revised its terminology to reflect the metabolic nature of this disease, renaming it metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease or MASLD. While we acknowledge that "MASLD" is quite a mouthful, we invite you to join us in using this more accurate and less stigmatizing term.

Before we delve into our agenda, allow me to introduce my esteemed colleagues who will be sharing their professional and personal experiences with this disease. Dr. Meena Bansal, System Chief at the Division of Liver Diseases and Director of MASLD/MASH Center of Excellence at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, David Frank, a national board member of ALF, and Susan Avallone, an Advocacy Ambassador at ALF, will be providing valuable insights shortly.

As the largest patient advocacy organization for people with liver disease, American Liver Foundation has been at the forefront since 1976, addressing the rising incidence of liver disease in the U.S. Through our website, free helpline, social media platforms, programs, and community events, we reach over four million people annually with vital health information, education, and support services. Our mission encompasses educating patients, families, caregivers, and healthcare professionals, advocating for patients' rights, funding medical research, and promoting public awareness campaigns about liver health and prevention. We stand as the trusted voice for all patients and families affected by liver disease.

So, what do we know? We know that MASLD affects up to 100 million Americans in the U.S. and is present in 75% of people who are overweight and in 90% of people who are severely obese. It is the most common form of childhood liver disease in the U.S., surging by over 100% in the past two decades, partly due to the rise in childhood obesity. Nonalcoholic steatohepatitis or NASH, which has also been renamed and is now called metabolic dysfunction associated steatohepatitis or MASH, is a severe and progressive form of MASLD, and has become the leading cause of liver transplantation in the U.S.

Preliminary data from our ongoing nationwide public health initiative to screen at-risk individuals called Think Liver Think Life® show 64% of those screened were found to have some indication of fatty liver disease. In our online liver health quiz to assess risk factors, 93% of respondents received a positive result for being at risk for NAFLD. I would encourage everyone here to find out if you are at risk and share this link so your constituents can find out if they are at risk too. The

quiz is available in English or Spanish at thinkliverthinklife.org and can easily be shared via social media or in other communications with people in your voting district.

The Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA), a bipartisan initiative, is crucial in providing Medicare beneficiaries access to effective treatments for obesity. Given the strong correlation between obesity and liver disease, this bill would provide crucial tools to address this urgent public health issue.

Furthermore, we're excited by the congressional authorization of a MASLD study, included in the FY2024 appropriations bill thanks to a partnership with Senator Cassidy's office. Conducted by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), this study is imperative in understanding MASLD's prevalence, diagnostic practices, treatment modalities, and potential complications. We aim to leverage the findings to raise awareness and shape a coordinated federal response to prevent the progression of MASLD and its severe consequences, such as liver cancer and failure, thereby reducing the necessity for liver transplants.

At American Liver Foundation, our vision is a world without liver disease. Thank you all for attending this briefing and I eagerly anticipate our discussion ahead.