

Serena Williams Goes Public With GLP-1 Use in Ro's Push to Normalize Weight Loss Drugs

Serena Williams is famous for her legendary tennis career, with 23 Grand Slam titles and four Olympic gold medals. From today, she'll also be known as a GLP-1 user.

The former tennis champion is opening up about her experience using weight loss drugs through Ro, a direct-to-consumer healthcare company that has offered GLP-1 medications since 2023. Williams has signed on as a celebrity patient ambassador for Ro and stars in the brand's new multi-year campaign launching Thursday (Aug. 21).

In teaming up with Williams, Ro's goal is to destigmatize the use of GLP-1 treatments for weight loss. This follows Ro's recruitment of NBA Hall of Famer and five-time Sports Emmy Award-winning broadcaster Charles Barkley as a GLP-1 celebrity ambassador in April.

As a storied athlete, Williams may seem an unexpected choice to tout GLP-1 treatment, which is partly why Ro chose her, according to co-founder and chief product officer Saman Rahmanian. The brand wants to counter the notion that using a GLP-1 medication is a "shortcut," he added.

"What's so powerful about Serena is that no one would ever say she doesn't have willpower. She's one of the most disciplined people in the world. And yet, she's sharing for the first time that she needed support to reach her health goals," Rahmanian

told ADWEEK. “If Serena, who works out every day, eats clean, and has spent her life at the top of her sport, needed support, it helps remove the stigma for everyone else.”

Williams was already a Ro patient before becoming a spokesperson, said Rahmanian. Her husband, Alexis Ohanian, is an investor in the company and serves on its board.

“We wanted a real Ro patient with an inspiring story,” Rahmanian said. “[Williams] is the perfect fit because her story is authentic, relatable, and deeply personal.”

The ad overlays Williams’ voiceover, which she co-wrote, with images of her using the Ro app and injecting herself with the medication. She talks candidly about how she turned to GLP-1 treatment for additional help to lose weight after pregnancy.

The national campaign will run across digital, broadcast, and out-of-home, including a presence at the US Open, Times Square, and the New York City subways. Ro’s in-house creative team developed the work, and Sage East directed it, while David Ma directed the social content capturing Williams at home.

Ro wanted the ads “to feel both personal and accessible,” Rahmanian said. “It shows what care with Ro actually looks like, and that makes it easier for people to see themselves taking that step.”

A GLP-1 marketing milestone

A campaign with a celebrity of Williams’ stature could be a turning point in the marketing of GLP-1 drugs, which have exploded in use since the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved GLP-1 medication semaglutide (under the brand name Wegovy) in 2021 for treating obesity. One in eight U.S. adults has now tried a GLP-1 drug like Ozempic, Wegovy, or Mounjaro, according to KFF data.

While celebrities such as Oprah, Amy Schumer, and Elon Musk have spoken about taking GLP-1 medications, there have been few formal celebrity brand partnerships in the category. A wave of GLP-1 influencers has emerged on TikTok, including Kim Carlos, Kelsey, and Rachel Knight Gullette.

Ro's approach also signals how the conversation around GLP-1s is becoming more mainstream.

Earlier this year, pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly, maker of weight-loss drugs Zepbound and Mounjaro, ran an ad during the Oscars that criticized people for taking GLP-1s without an obesity diagnosis. Eli Lilly struck a deal with Ro at the end of 2024 to sell Zepbound on the platform.

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