

● Impact of Obesity

Obesity is a disease that continues to have a growing impact on our society's health and future. **More than 93 million Americans are affected by obesity and action must be taken to address this epidemic at all levels – individual, family, community, government, healthcare and insurance.**

● Complexity of Obesity

Obesity is a multi-factorial chronic disease requiring a comprehensive approach to both prevent and treat. **Obesity is a major contributor to a large number of preventable deaths in the U.S. and it carries with it a large number of related conditions such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, certain cancers, sleep apnea and arthritis.**

● Treating Obesity

Treating or addressing obesity among those already affected by obesity is difficult. This is clearly demonstrated by the more than 35 percent of Americans who are currently affected by obesity. However challenging though, efforts must be made to both prevent and treat obesity at all stages and in all age groups. Treatment approaches should include: school and community-based programs; lifestyle interventions; educational programs; drug, diet and physician-supervised programs; nutritional counseling; and bariatric surgery.

● Weight Bias and Obesity

The disease of obesity is the last acceptable form of discrimination in today's society. Individuals affected by obesity are stigmatized in healthcare, education, employment and mass media. The term "headless obese person" has become commonplace as many news stories covering obesity often show an individual affected by obesity only from the shoulders down. **In a Rudd Center study of more than 2,400 adults affected by excess weight or obesity, 54 percent reported that they had been stigmatized by co-workers because of their weight, and 43 percent said they had experienced weight bias from employers and supervisors.**

● Obesity and Minorities

African Americans have one of the highest rates of obesity among all ethnic groups in the U.S. Epidemiologic studies have also determined that obesity is a major contributing factor in the high prevalence of type 2 diabetes in the African American community. The reasons for these startling statistics are multi-factorial and are related to genetic and environmental patterns – including dietary choices, sedentary lifestyles and cultural norms. Additionally, **Hispanics and Native Americans are also greatly affected by obesity due to diet, culture and a limited access to healthcare (due to cultural norms).** The future of these minorities is also at stake since they have been experiencing the highest rates of increase in childhood obesity. **On average, 25 percent of children in these minority populations are affected by obesity.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 41 percent of the Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations are also affected.

● Children and Obesity

Today, one out of every three children is affected by obesity. Children who are considered affected by childhood obesity are 70 percent more likely to continue being affected by obesity into adulthood. Environmental factors, such as a lack of physical activity and technological advances, have led to a more sedentary lifestyle. As with adults affected by obesity, children also experience a negative stigma especially in educational settings. This lack of societal acceptance can lead to poor self-esteem and depression in some children.

● Insurance and the Treatment of Obesity

Most insurance providers exclude obesity management services. Health insurance should provide care for obesity as an essential standard benefit – establishing coverage for the most appropriate and proven prevention and treatment methods to address the given stage of overweight or obesity. Individuals must have access to this comprehensive treatment approach through reasonable means and this access to care should not be hindered by undue tests or prerequisites on the part of the individual affected.

● Cost of Obesity in the U.S.

The economic burden of obesity is staggering and estimated, by the Society of Actuaries, at \$200 billion dollars annually, with more than half of such costs paid by government through Medicare, Medicaid and Disability programs. As such, all parts of society, including government, can and should have a role in addressing the obesity epidemic to not only improve the lives of Americans burdened by obesity, but also to protect the bottom line.

Contact the OAC

If you have any questions regarding the above information or would like to interview an OAC representative, please contact James Zervios, OAC Director of Communications, at jzervios@obesityaction.org.

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