

## The Costs of Obesity

The Obesity Health Alliance is a coalition of over 40 leading charities, medical royal colleges and campaign groups working together to share their expertise and support the Government in tackling the complex issue of overweight and obesity in the UK.

### **Summary**

- The human costs of obesity are well known. Being overweight or obese significantly increases the risk of devastating, but largely preventable diseases, including, type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart and liver disease, stroke and related mental health conditions.<sup>1</sup>
- But spiralling rates of obesity is far bigger than just a health issue. The evidence is clear that obesity racks up a staggering bill - at least £5.1 billion to the NHS<sup>2</sup> and tens of billions to UK society every year.<sup>3</sup>
- These are enormous numbers. But we pay for them through our taxes, and businesses lose out when their staff suffer from completely avoidable illness. The economy loses out due to reduced productivity and obesity related illness making people unable to work.
- Failure to tackle obesity is kicking an enormous debt – tens of billions of pounds a year – into the long grass and expecting future generations to pay for it.
- Obesity's contribution to the national debt can be avoided. By properly tackling obesity with comprehensive and bold action today the Government will improve the health of our population and help businesses, taxpayers and the NHS now and in the future.
- The impact that obesity has across our society is vast and different studies scope and define costs differently. The last Government review into the costs of obesity is now ten years old therefore there is no one analysis that provides the comprehensive costs associated with all the diseases we know that obesity causes or exacerbates. There is also no comprehensive assessment of the costs of childhood obesity.
- While individual cost estimates differ, academic evidence is unanimous that the high prevalence of overweight and obesity in the UK is causing substantial costs to the NHS and wider society. With no evidence suggesting a decline in overweight and obesity prevalence among children or adults, these costs are highly unlikely to diminish in future.
- Without strong action the health and societal costs of obesity are likely to increase in future.<sup>4</sup> Maintaining the status quo and failing to tackle obesity is simply not a sustainable option.

### **Costs of obesity to NHS**

- The NHS spends at least £5.1 billion a year dealing with ill health caused by overweight and obesity in England.<sup>2</sup> This figure is based on NHS data from 2005-6 so is likely to be an underestimate as rates of obesity have increased since then and the analysis did not include all diseases linked to obesity.
- The NHS carried out 6,438 bariatric surgery procedures in 2015/16.<sup>5</sup> This is likely to have cost in the region of £36.6 million,<sup>6</sup> although in the long-term these procedures can be cost saving to the NHS.
- By 2035 the increasing rate of diseases associated with obesity such as heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, stroke and cancer has been estimated to cost an extra £2.5 billion per year.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Costs of obesity to society***

- An economic analysis has predicted that overweight and obesity costs UK society at least £27 billion each year.<sup>3</sup> This figure is based on 2014 data and is an attempt to calculate all the wider societal costs of obesity, beyond the NHS costs. It also identifies that a range of evidence-based policy options can achieve health benefits at surprisingly little cost per improved case of health.
- This report also finds that obesity is one of the top three global social burdens caused by human beings, second only to smoking and armed conflict.

### ***Putting the costs of obesity into context***

The NHS spend on obesity related disease of £5.1 billion per year is equivalent to:

- the salary of around 163,000 nurses or 85,000 hospital doctors<sup>8</sup>
- the cost of carrying out more than 115,000 heart transplants or more than 718,000 hip replacements<sup>9</sup>
- The cost of 959 fully kitted out new air ambulances.<sup>10</sup>
- The cost of an eight-hour course of talking therapy for 12.75 million people.<sup>11</sup>
- The salary of 222,000 newly qualified teachers.<sup>12</sup>
- Every single person in the UK making a one-off payment of £78.<sup>13</sup>
- An annual salary at the Living Wage level for nearly 310,000 people.<sup>14</sup>

### ***The impact of interventions***

- Studies suggest that if levels of obesity could be reduced by 1% every year from the predicted trend between 2015 and 2035, £300 million could be saved in direct health and social care costs in the year 2035 alone.<sup>15</sup>
- A 2016 modelling study found that the levy could potentially save up to 144,000 adults and children from obesity every year, prevent 19,000 cases of type 2 diabetes and avoid 270,000 decayed teeth<sup>16</sup>, which would have a knock on effect in reducing costs to the NHS.
- Relative to the costs of obesity, a very small amount is invested in bariatric surgery and programmes that support weight loss. These types of interventions have the potential to reduce some of the very serious complications of people being overweight and therefore reduce costs to the NHS and wider society in the long-term.

### ***Challenges of understanding costs of obesity***

- Existing data on the direct and indirect costs of obesity are likely to be underestimates. This is due to the calculations not including all diseases associated with obesity and differing societal variables being used in different studies.
- There is no current data on the costs to the NHS or society of childhood obesity.

## Tackling obesity

- Together the Obesity Health Alliance represents the views of hundreds of thousands of health professionals and public health experts across the UK whose scope of work includes cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, nursing, mental health and child health.
- We are calling on the Government to implement a comprehensive package of measures to reduce obesity and address the social inequality in overweight and obesity prevalence. This must include the following priorities: swift and full implementation of the sugar and calorie reduction programmes, with meaningful sanctions for companies who fail to meet the targets; action to restrict children from viewing adverts for food and drink products high in fat, sugar and salt; and full implementation of the soft drinks industry levy.

Contact For any enquiries relating to this briefing, please contact Caroline Cerny:

[Caroline.Cerny@ukhealthforum.org.uk](mailto:Caroline.Cerny@ukhealthforum.org.uk) / [www.obesityhealthalliance.org.uk](http://www.obesityhealthalliance.org.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> NHS Choices. <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Obesity/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Scarborough P, Bhatnagar P, Wickramasinghe KK et al. The economic burden of ill health due to diet, physical inactivity, smoking, alcohol and obesity in the UK: an update to 2006/07 NHS costs. *J Public Health (Oxon)* 2011;33(4):527-35.

<sup>3</sup> McKinsey Global Institute. 2014. *Overcoming Obesity: an initial economic analysis*

<sup>4</sup> Foresight (2007). *Tackling obesities: future choices—modelling future trends in obesity & their impact on health*. The Stationery Office

[http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Obesity/obesity\\_final/Index.html](http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Obesity/obesity_final/Index.html)

<sup>5</sup> NHS Digital (2017). *Statistics on Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet - England, 2017*

<http://www.content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB23742>

<sup>6</sup> Figure taken from NICE. <https://www.nice.org.uk/news/article/offer-weight-loss-surgery-to-diabetics>

<sup>7</sup> Cancer Research UK and UK Health Forum (2016). *Tipping the Scales: why preventing obesity makes economic sense*. [https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/tipping\\_the\\_scales\\_-\\_cruk\\_full\\_report11.pdf](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/tipping_the_scales_-_cruk_full_report11.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> NHS Digital (2016). *NHS Staff Earnings Estimates. Estimates to September 2016, Provisional statistics* <http://content.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB22697/nhs-staff-earn-sept-16.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Department of Health (2016). *Reference Costs 2015-16*.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/577083/Reference\\_Costs\\_2015-16.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577083/Reference_Costs_2015-16.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Information taken from the Yorkshire Air Ambulance Service:

<http://www.yorkshireairambulance.org.uk/vision/how-much-does-it-all-cost>

<sup>11</sup> Information taken from BBC article: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-32309311>

<sup>12</sup> Information taken from the Department for Education's 'Get into teaching website':

<https://getintoteaching.education.gov.uk/funding-and-salary/teacher-salaries>

<sup>13</sup> Figures taken from Office for National Statistics:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/overviewoftheukpopulation/mar2017>

<sup>14</sup> Figures taken from The Living Wage Foundation: <https://www.livingwage.org.uk/what-living-wage-annual-salary>

<sup>15</sup> Cancer Research UK and UK Health Forum (2016). *Tipping the Scales: why preventing obesity makes economic sense*. [https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/tipping\\_the\\_scales\\_-\\_cruk\\_full\\_report11.pdf](https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/tipping_the_scales_-_cruk_full_report11.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Briggs A, Mytton O, Kehlbacher A. et al. (2016). Health impact assessment of the UK soft drinks industry levy: a comparative risk assessment modelling study. *The Lancet Public Health*. 2(1):e15-e22. [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(16\)30037-8/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(16)30037-8/fulltext) 9 World Health Organisation.