

THE ADULT OBESITY EPIDEMIC: ITS IMPACT AND INTERVENTION EFFORTS

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Obesity has been described as a national epidemic in the U.S. Over 35% of adults in the U.S. are obese. In twelve states, Texas included, over 30% of adults are obese.

Obesity is defined as an excessive amount of body fat in relation to lean tissue. An adult with a body mass index -- a calculation based on weight and height ratios -- of 30 or more is considered obese.

Some groups are affected by obesity more than others. African Americans (49.5%) have the highest age-adjusted rates of obesity as compared to Mexican American (40.4%) and all Hispanics (39.1%).

IMPACT OF ADULT OBESITY

Obesity is the second leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. Some of the most common and costly medical problems can be attributed to obesity -- heart disease, hypertension and diabetes, stroke and some types of cancer. Over 25 million Americans have type 2 diabetes, 27 million have chronic heart disease, 68 million have hypertension and 50 million have arthritis. Almost 800,000 Americans have a stroke each year and one in three cancer deaths each year are obesity-related.

Additionally, obesity-related medical expenses account for almost 10% of all medical spending -- an amount that ranges from \$147 to \$210 billion each year. On average, adults with obesity-related health issues pay over \$1400 annually in medical costs in comparison to an adult who is normal weight.

If the obesity epidemic continues at its current trajectory, by 2030:

- Adult obesity rates will exceed 44% in every state.
- The number of new cases of obesity-related diseases could increase ten-fold between 2010 and 2020, and then double again by 2030.
- Obesity-related health care costs could increase by over 10% in 43 states.

On the other hand, decreasing the average adult body mass index by only 5% in each state would lower the incidence of obesity-related diseases and save billions of dollars in health care costs.

ADULT OBESITY IN TEXAS

Adult obesity rates have increased at an alarming rate in Texas. From 1990 to 2009, the number of obese adults in Texas more than doubled from 12.3% to 29.5%. Moreover:

- Today, fully two-thirds of Texans are overweight or clinically obese.
- In 2011, Texas was one of ten states with the highest adult obesity rates in the country.
- Hispanic and African-Americans have higher obesity rates than other groups in the state.
- While obesity rates increased for all age groups, older Texans are more likely to be obese.
- Hispanics and older Texans are the two fastest growing populations in the state, left unchanged, experts predict that almost 15 million Texas adults will be obese by 2040.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ADULT OBESITY

Snacking and Dining Out - People are snacking and eating out more often. Rather than healthy snacks, they are choosing high calorie, ready-to-eat foods. When dining out, consumers eat high-calorie foods that are lower in nutritional value. Restaurant serving sizes have increased dramatically since the 1970s.

Access to Healthy Food – In some areas, there are few supermarkets or grocery stores, reducing access to healthy food. These food deserts are commonly found in low income communities.

Physical Inactivity - Families are faced with competing priorities that limit opportunities for physical activity. Longer hours at work and commute time have cut into free time for exercise. Technology and electronic gadgets compete for free time.

Access to Parks - Access to parks encourages physical activity. Those who live near parks are more likely to use them. Poor access to parks is common in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas.

SAN ANTONIO AND BEXAR COUNTY

In 2003, the Center for Disease Control identified San Antonio as having the nation's highest obesity rate at 31.1% of adults. Things have since improved. In the San Antonio Metropolitan area, the percentage of obese adults decreased to 25% in 2009. Still, the rates of diabetes and end-stage renal disease — two common outcomes of long-term obesity — are approximately twice the national average.

A study conducted in 2010 found that 17% of the population in Bexar County lived in a food desert. Park distribution is, likewise, uneven. In the west and southwest parts of San Antonio, there are 3.0 and 5.1 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, respectively – well below the national average of 16 acres per 1,000 residents.

San Antonio is now working to combat obesity by promoting healthy eating and physical activity while ensuring the community has access to nutritional food. These efforts include:

- A program in partnership with local restaurants to facilitate healthy food choices
- Distribution of chilled bins that enable neighborhood stores to stock fresh produce
- Expansion of farmer's markets
- A Bicycle share program
- Fitness assessment stations and exercise equipment at libraries and parks
- *Siclovía* – a street-closure event that promotes biking, skating and walking
- Expanded greenways to encourage biking and hiking

AGENCIES WORKING TO REDUCE OBESITY AND PROMOTE HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

San Antonio Food Bank – <http://www.safoodbank.org>

YMCA of Greater San Antonio - <http://www.ymcasatx.org/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - <http://www.cdc.gov/>

Mayor's Fitness Council - <http://fitcitysa.com/mayorsfitnesscouncil.aspx>

Texas State Demographer - "Findings About the Obesity Epidemic in Texas". Summary report available at: http://txsdc.utsa.edu/Reports/2009/ObesityRateProjections/THI_Obesity_Summary.pdf

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