

## Press Release

### **New Study Estimates Economic Impact of Obesity Could Double to Average 3.6% of GDP by 2060**

- **Without global investment and prioritization, economic impact of obesity could double from an average of 1.76% in 2019 to 3.6% by 2060**
- **Maintaining 2019 levels of obesity could mean average annual savings of 13%**
- **Calls for urgent action including UN resolution on obesity and coordinated national government policy changes to address root causes**
- **Pilot study covers 8 countries: Australia, Brazil, India, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain and Thailand**

**A pilot study conducted by the World Obesity Federation and RTI International (RTI), a nonprofit research institute, and published in BMJ Global Health, has estimated the economic impact of obesity could reach an average of 3.6% of annual GDP in eight countries. The study calculates national economic impacts are projected to double by 2060 if urgent action is not taken by political and public health leaders around the world.**

The two organizations warn that the new evidence should not be used to scapegoat or further stigmatize people living with obesity, but instead be a catalyst for change with recommendations including a UN resolution on obesity and the delivery of joined up national policies which recognize and address the underlying root causes of obesity.

**“We have a simple message for governments; inaction on obesity, lack of ambition and disjointed thinking in public health responses are hurting those who need it most, and the impact can be seen across society,”** said Johanna Ralston, CEO of the World Obesity Federation. **“Investment and prioritization today will benefit everyone tomorrow.”**

The study was commissioned in response to continued political inaction on the [root causes of overweight and obesity](#); a chronic, relapsing, and progressive disease that 800 million people are living with and is rising fastest in lower- and middle-income countries.

Despite the scale of the public health crisis, existing obesity strategies often focus solely on the individual and do not address the societal, biological, and environmental drivers that are responsible for rising levels of obesity such as genetics, lack of access to healthy food systems and aggressive marketing. By broadening the evidence base to look at national economic impact, the authors hope that real change will come.

**“People living with obesity are the ones who will acutely feel and experience cost and impact every day, from direct medical expenses to the cost of delayed care associated with lack of health systems support, through to the broader social and societal consequences,”** said Ralston. **“By looking collectively at indirect and direct economic impact at the national level, we can hold governments more accountable.”**

The pilot study of eight countries, which will be followed by a full global study of 140 countries in Spring 2022, found that high BMI had a significant economic impact in 2019.

The findings were calculated by looking at both direct, such as healthcare expenditures and costs associated with travelling to seek care, and indirect costs, such as premature mortality

and absenteeism from work. It was found that the indirect costs accounted for 65% of total impacts.

The pilot study found that in 2019 high BMI cost India \$23billion. In Brazil, Saudi Arabia and Australia costs amounted to \$39billion, \$19billion, and \$24billion, respectively. This is the equivalent of 0.8%, 2.1%, 2.4% and 1.7% of GDP.

Significant economic impact was estimated regardless of income level and geography, with the full pilot showing similar trends also in Mexico, South Africa, Spain and Thailand.

If urgent action is not taken, the study reports that the economic impact in all eight countries is projected to double to an average of 3.6% of GDP by 2060. An estimated cost of \$61billion, \$160billion, \$28billion and \$93billion in Spain, Mexico, South Africa and Thailand, respectively.

However, the study is also optimistic that reversing this trend is possible. The authors found that maintaining or reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity can diminish the economic impacts in the future. A 5% reduction in obesity prevalence from the projected levels would result in average annual savings of around 5.2% across all eight countries between 2020 and 2060. Alternatively, if prevalence remains at 2019 levels until 2060, this would result in average annual savings of 13%.

**“We know that people living with obesity are at an increased risk of disease and death – something that the COVID-19 pandemic has unfortunately made very clear,”** said Rachel Nugent, Vice President of Global Noncommunicable Diseases at RTI. **“We hope that the reality of these risks, along with our findings, renew a sense of urgency to address the obesity crisis on a global scale. It is never too late to make meaningful policy changes in an effort to improve livelihoods and slow economic impacts.”**

Ahead of the full report in spring 2022, World Obesity and RTI are calling for implementation of evidence-based policies to support populations globally to live healthier lives. These policies must address the prevention, treatment and management of obesity, and focus on building healthy environments.

Progress will require all sectors of society including patients, governments, health care providers, educators, food manufacturers and employers to work together. Obesity prevention strategies must then be developed, tested, and implemented across all life stages, from pre-conception, through childhood, and into older age. Health care professionals have an important role to play and must be given access to obesity education and training.

## **ENDS**

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### **Pilot Report: Headline Findings**

- Significant economic impact was found regardless of income level and geography. The full study covered Australia, Brazil, India, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain and Thailand.
- Differences in economic impact across countries are due to differences in prevalence, attributable mortality, economic strength, wage differences, employment rates, national health expenditure and age distribution of obesity-attributable mortality.

- Projected rises in economic impact up to 2060 are due to increases in overweight and obesity prevalence, population changes and economic growth.

**\* Economic impact of overweight and obesity in 2019 as total costs, costs per capita expressed in 2019 USD, and as a percentage of GDP**

2019	Total costs, 2019 USD (billions)	Total costs per capita, 2019 USD	Total costs as a percentage of GDP
Australia	23.7	940	1.7%
Brazil	38.8	184	2.1%
India	23.2	17	0.8%
Mexico	26.0	204	2.1%
Saudi Arabia	19.2	559	2.4%
South Africa	5.5	95	1.6%
Spain	29.1	622	2.1%
Thailand	6.9	99	1.3%

**\*\* Projected economic impact of overweight and obesity in 2060 as total costs, costs per capita expressed in 2019 USD, and as a percentage of GDP**

2060	Total costs (USD billions)	Total costs per capita, 2019 USD	Total costs as a percentage of GDP
Australia	103.30	2,956	2.50%
Brazil	181.07	807	4.54%
India	479.02	290	2.75%
Mexico	159.99	1,018	4.67%
Saudi Arabia	78.09	1,722	4.16%
South Africa	27.52	352	2.60%
Spain	61.28	1,493	2.43%
Thailand	93.47	1,515	4.88%

**Further Information:**

- Embargoed link to research: <http://press.psprings.co.uk/gh/november/bmigh006351.pdf>
- Public link once embargo lifts: <https://globalhealth.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/bmigh-2021-006351>

- **The summary report:** <https://www.worldobesity.org/resources/resource-library/the-economic-impact-of-overweight-obesity-in-8-countries>
- **Interactive data from the study on World Obesity's Global Obesity Observatory:** <https://data.worldobesity.org/economic-impact/>
- **World Obesity's image bank with non-stigmatising images:** <https://www.worldobesity.org/resources/image-bank>
- **Report on weight stigma in the media:** <http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wof-files/MediaReport.pdf>
- **Report on Obesity & COVID-19:** <https://www.worldobesity.org/resources/resource-library/covid-19-and-obesity-the-2021-atlas>

### Report Funding

- This project has been funded by a grant from Novo Nordisk to the World Obesity Federation. Novo Nordisk has had no influence over any aspect of this project, and WOF retains full editorial control in conjunction with RTI International.
- World Obesity and RTI International have put several safeguards in place to maintain transparency, reproducibility, and iterative critical review of the research process for this project.

### About World Obesity Federation:

- The World Obesity Federation <http://www.worldobesity.org> is the only global organisation focused exclusively on obesity. It brings together member organisations dedicated to solving the problems of obesity, representing professional members of the scientific, medical and research communities from over 50 regional and national obesity associations.
- The World Obesity Federation is calling on Governments to adopt the 'ROOTS' framework for tackling obesity which was developed by a panel of global obesity experts last year. The 'ROOTS' framework for actions involves Recognising the root causes, monitoring Obesity data, investing in Obesity prevention, ensuring access to Treatments, and adopting a Systems-based approach.
- The World Obesity Federation is a lead partner to global agencies on obesity, including WHO – with which it has formal consultative status, approved by the World Health Assembly.

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### About RTI International:

- RTI International is an independent, nonprofit research institute dedicated to improving the human condition. Clients rely on us to answer questions that demand an objective and multidisciplinary approach — one that integrates expertise across the social and laboratory sciences, engineering and international development. We believe in the promise of science, and we are inspired every day to deliver on that promise for the good of people, communities and businesses around the world. For more information, visit [www.rti.org](http://www.rti.org).

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