

Policy Extract

[The Costs of Obesity](#)

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.
- But spiralling rates of obesity is far bigger than just a health issue.
- 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. Maintaining the status quo and failing to tackle obesity is simply not a sustainable option.

Costs of obesity to the NHS

- The NHS spends at least £5.1 billion a year dealing with ill health caused by overweight and obesity in England. 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.
- An economic analysis has predicted that overweight and obesity costs UK society at least £27 billion each year. 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.

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.
- 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.