



Obesity and overweight cost about US\$166 billion in Asia and the Pacific

Obesity and overweight are among the main risk factors of noncommunicable diseases that kill millions of people worldwide. How much do these diseases cost health systems and economies?

In the United States, every obese person spends about \$2,741 a year for additional health care. In Japan, overweight and obesity cost \$1,537 a person. US businesses spend about \$66 billion because of the absenteeism and lower productivity caused by overweight and obesity. The numbers are similar for European countries.

Much less is known for Asia and the Pacific. Recent studies suggest that obesity accounts for 12% of total health care expenditures or 0.78% of gross domestic product or about \$166 billion. Overweight and obesity in Asia and the Pacific result in direct costs that amount to 8.9% of health expenditure. Direct costs are all additional health expenditures associated with the condition, including hospital care and medicines, for example. Indirect costs are as high as 3.46% of health care expenditure. Indirect costs are those incurred by the economy because of sickness and death.

Both conditions could severely undermine the economic and human development of the region, and seriously threaten the region's prosperity.

What can be done?

One. Ensure that school food is healthy. Influencing children's food choices has been successful in most Western countries.

Two. Regulate marketing of unhealthy foods. Aggressive television marketing plays a big role in influencing food choices, including those of children, and several countries have imposed restrictions on the marketing of certain foods. Tax unhealthy foods such as sugar to steer the consumer toward healthier food. Introduce food labels that allow consumers to make better-informed decisions.

Three. Encourage physical activity. Sports should be part of school curricula at every grade and promoted among people of all ages through urban planning. Cities with a dense network of public transportation as well as sidewalks encourage citizens to walk instead of taking cars. Urban planners should also include parks and similar amenities that foster physical activity.

This has been a summary of part of [The Imminent Obesity Crisis in Asia and the Pacific: First Cost Estimates](#), a working paper by ADBI senior economist and head of research [Matthias Helble](#) and ADBI research associate [Kris Francisco](#).

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Know more about ADBI's work on overweight and obesity

- <https://www.adb.org/adbi/search/year/2017?keywords=obesity>

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- [Obesity in Pacific Island countries and territories: How big a problem is it?](#)
By Jillian Wate