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MEDIA RELEASE

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Researchers Call for Urgent Action as New Study Estimates the Economic Impact of Obesity in Australia

- **Warning that economic impact could double by 2060 without global investment and prioritization**

A pilot study conducted by the World Obesity Federation and RTI International, an independent, nonprofit research institute, and published this week in *BMJ Global Health*, has estimated the economic impact of obesity in Australia to cost \$23.7 billion USD annually (1.7% of the country's GDP). Without urgent action, the study estimates this cost could increase to \$103 billion USD by 2060.

Australian partner, the Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society (ANZOS) is joining the report authors to call for this new evidence to support the delivery of comprehensive policies to recognise and address the underlying root causes of obesity.

“We have a simple message for governments; inaction on obesity and disjointed public health responses are hurting those who need it most, and the impact can be seen across society,” said Jane Martin, President of ANZOS. **“We need targeted and comprehensive government action at all levels, to turn this around.”**

With consultation recently closed on the draft of Australia's first National Obesity Prevention Strategy (NOPS), leading public health bodies including ANZOS, are calling for the NOPS to be strengthened to show a stronger commitment to action. The strategy sets out a roadmap to address the prevention, treatment and management of obesity from birth to adulthood in Australia for the next ten years but needs strong leadership from all governments to oversee the implementation and funding of the strategy.

“Given the major health and financial costs for the nation and the pressure our health system is already experiencing, addressing obesity should be a key focus. This data illustrates the breadth of the problem, which is going to continue to worsen. We have no more time to wait, we need to ensure the obesity strategy is strengthened and that evidence-based strategies are prioritised ,” said Ms. Martin

Despite the scale of the public health crisis, existing obesity strategies often focus 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 and aggressive marketing techniques. By broadening the evidence base to look at national economic impact, the authors hope that real change will come.

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

The findings were calculated by looking at both direct costs, 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 high BMI cost Australia \$23.7 billion USD. In India, Brazil and Saudi Arabia costs amounted to \$23 billion, \$39 billion and \$19 billion USD respectively. This is the equivalent of 1.7%, 0.8%, 2.1% and 2.4% 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, including Australia, is projected to rise between 2.4% - 4.8% by 2060. An estimated cost of \$61 billion, \$160 billion, \$28 billion and \$93 billion USD 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 reduce the economic impacts in the future.

“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 next year, World Obesity Federation 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.

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Jane Martin, President of Australian and New Zealand Obesity Society is available for interview – contact Natalie Kaplan on 0409 566 533

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:

- Full report in BMJ Global Health: <https://globalhealth.bmj.com/lookup/doi/10.1136/bmjgh-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://obesitycanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WOF_Media_guidelinesDev1-1.pdf
- Report on Obesity & COVID-19: <https://www.worldobesity.org/resources/resource-library/covid-19-and-obesity-the-2021-atlas>

About World Obesity Federation:

- The World Obesity Federation <http://www.worldobesity.org> is the only global organization focused exclusively on obesity. It brings together member organizations 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 Recognizing 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.

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.