



Purpose and Scope

Researchers at RTI International, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) analyzed the annual medical expenditures attributable to obesity.

The study was published on *Health Affairs'* Web site.

Key Findings

- Medical expenditures attributable to obesity have doubled in less than a decade, and may be as high as \$147 billion per year.
- The increase in medical expenditures is due to the rise in the prevalence of obesity; between 1998 and 2006, obesity (body mass index greater than 30) increased by 37 percent.
- An obese person has \$1,429 per year higher medical costs, or about 42 percent higher costs, than someone of normal weight. Costs for obese Medicare recipients are even greater.

Report Sponsor

The study was funded by CDC. The analysis was based on data from the 1998 and 2006 Medical Expenditure Panel Surveys.

About RTI International

RTI International is one of the world's leading research institutes, dedicated to improving the human condition by turning knowledge into practice. Our staff of more than 2,800 provides research and technical expertise to governments and businesses in more than 40 countries in the areas of health and pharmaceuticals, education and training, surveys and statistics, advanced technology, international development, economic and social policy, energy and the environment, and laboratory and chemistry services. For more information, visit www.rti.org.

Research & Policy Brief



Obesity Costs U.S. About \$147 Billion Annually, Study Finds

What the Study Found

Annual medical expenditures attributable to obesity have doubled in less than a decade, and may be as high as \$147 billion per year.

Results of the new study found that between 1998 and 2006, the prevalence of obesity (body mass index greater than 30) increased by 37 percent.

This increase is responsible for 89 percent of the increase in obesity costs that occurred during this time period. The results reveal that obesity is now responsible for 9.1 percent of annual medical expenditures, compared with 6.5 percent in 1998.

The study also showed that an obese person has \$1,429 per year higher medical costs, or about 42 percent higher costs, than someone of normal weight. Costs for an obese Medicare recipient are even greater.

Much of the costs to Medicare are a result of the added prescription drug benefit. The results reveal that Medicare prescription drug payments for obese individuals are roughly \$600 more per year than drug payments for normal weight beneficiaries.

The researchers also found that 8.5 percent of Medicare expenditures, 11.8 percent of Medicaid expenditures, and 12.9 percent of private payer expenditures are attributable to obesity.

The authors suggest that although bariatric surgery and other treatments for obesity are increasing in popularity, in actuality these treatments remain rare. As a result, the authors said, the medical costs attributable to obesity are almost entirely a result of costs generated from treating the diseases that obesity promotes. Thus, obesity will continue to impose a significant burden on the health care system as long as the prevalence of obesity remains high.