
Overweight elderly Americans contribute to financial burdens of US healthcare system

Being overweight or obese is not only a personal issue that affects one's health, but is also a public health issue that impacts other people in society. A new study in the journal *Health Services Research* reveals that the extra Medicare cost associated with overweight elderly people could place a significant financial burden on tax payers, costing up to hundreds of billions of dollars across the entire current Medicare population.

The article's findings show that treating the health needs of an overweight or obese elderly person will cost Medicare 6 to 17 percent more over a lifetime than treating an elderly person with a healthy weight. The authors used a measure of weight that takes into account a person's height, known as the body mass index and looked at total costs from Medicare alone for individuals covered from age 65 until death. The extra demands made of the healthcare system by overweight and obese elderly amounts to Medicare's spending on average an extra \$15,000 on overweight elderly individuals and an extra \$26,000 on obese individuals.

"Our research provides valuable information for why the public and health policy makers need to pay attention to the financial burden of health care for overweight Americans besides it's being just a health issue," Professor Zhou Yang at Emory University conclude. "More aggressive public health campaigns or early behavioral or policy intervention to stop the obesity epidemic could be cost-effective as well as otherwise beneficial for society."

Zhou Yang, Ph.D., MPH of Emory University and Allyson G. Hall of University of Florida used data from the longitudinal Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey from 1992 to 2001 to construct a model of the relationship between body weight and health care expenditures amongst different baseline weights at age 65 followed up to death.

Article adapted by Medical News Today from original press release. This study is published in the June 2008 issue of *Health Services Research*. Zhou Yang, Ph.D., MPH, is affiliated with Emory University.



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