

Inequalities in Obesity in Canada



NEARLY
1 in 5

Canadians are classified as obese, based on their self-reported height and weight. Obesity is a chronic condition where an individual has excess body fat that can have an impact on health. It is measured using the Body Mass Index (BMI).*

The root causes of obesity are complex and may include:

Individual factors



Health behaviours (e.g. eating habits, physical activity and sedentary behaviours)



Genetics

Environmental factors



Built environment (e.g. neighbourhood design; accessibility to nutritious foods)



Policy environment (e.g. how food is advertised and sold)



Social and cultural norms (e.g. cultural values around food and body size/shape)

Obesity can contribute to:



Chronic diseases, including Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers



Mental health conditions and poor psychological well-being



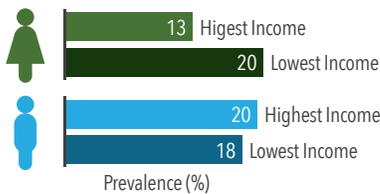
Stigma, discrimination and social isolation



Increased social and economic costs

Socioeconomic status is associated with the rates of obesity differently for men and women:

- Women who have lower incomes have higher rates of obesity than those with higher incomes, while for men the opposite is true.



- Inequalities in obesity by education level are more pronounced among women than among men:

Obesity among women with no high school diploma is **2.2x** higher than those with a university degree.

Obesity among men with no high school diploma is **1.7x** higher than those with a university degree.

The proportion of adults with obesity is:

1.6x
HIGHER

among those with severe functional health impairments than those with no impairment.

1.6x
HIGHER

among those who are permanently unable to work than those who are employed.

Compared to non-Indigenous adults, the prevalence of adults with obesity among Indigenous peoples is:

1.6x HIGHER

among First Nations living off reserve

1.6x HIGHER

among Inuit

1.4x HIGHER

among Métis

Inequities experienced by First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations are a direct result of colonial policies and practices that included massive forced relocation, loss of lands, creation of the reserve system, banning of Indigenous languages and cultural practices, and creation of the residential school system. Unaddressed intergenerational trauma adds to the ongoing challenges faced by Indigenous peoples.

Reducing inequalities in obesity requires broadening public health efforts to include comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategies that both promote healthy choices and simultaneously support economic, social, cultural, and built environmental changes to make those choices easier.

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* BMI is calculated by dividing an individual's weight in kilograms by their height in metres, squared. BMI of 30.0 kg/m² or higher is considered obese for adults aged 18 and over.

Source: Canadian Community Health Survey—Annual Component (2010–2013)

For more data on health inequalities in Canada, visit: www.health-infobase.canada.ca/health-inequalities

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