

ISSUE BRIEF

Obesity Crisis

Issue Brief Series Editor: Susan K.E. Saxon-Harrold

Author: Lara Bensenia



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This CAFAmerica Issue Brief presents a synopsis of facts, research and funding opportunities for causes you care about. It isn't meant to be a comprehensive report, and for that reason, provides a list of resources and website where you can learn more.

Managing the health and social consequences of obesity is now a global phenomenon. Doctors define obesity as when an individual's weight in kilograms is more than thirty times bigger than their height in meters squared. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 1.6 billion adults worldwide were overweight in 2005; at least 400 million adults were obese.¹ In the past three decades, obesity rates have tripled or more in certain regions of North America, the United Kingdom, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Pacific Islands, Australia, and China. However, obesity is not a problem unique to industrialized countries – it is also spreading in developing countries, often at a more rapid rate than in developed ones, and when combined with poverty creates an even greater challenge for policy makers and health care professionals.²

Obesity is also a growing concern among children and adolescents. In Europe, being overweight or obese is the most common childhood disorder, according to the WHO.

About 20% of European children are currently overweight and one third of these are obese.³ Approximately nine million children over six years old in the U.S. are obese.⁴ Even countries once relatively sheltered from the obesity crisis, like Malaysia and Japan, are today experiencing a surge in childhood obesity.⁵ As a result of increasing obesity rates, children are now developing obesity-related diseases, like type 2 diabetes, previously only seen in adults.⁶

The health consequences of obesity are numerous and can be life threatening. They include heart disease—one of the world's leading causes of death, diabetes, stroke and arthritis. Six in ten Americans are overweight, with 32.2% of adults aged 20-74 falling into the obese category. Related health care costs are estimated to grow to between \$860.7 billion to \$956.9 billion by 2030 and account for 16% to 18% of all medical expenditures according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC).⁷ With 100,000 deaths per year attributed to obesity, the economic

CAFAmerica

King Street Station
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 150
Alexandria, VA 22314-2840

(1) 703-549-8931 Phone
(1) 703-549-8934 Fax
info@cafamerica.org E-Mail
www.cafamerica.org Web
www.twitter.com/cafamerica Twitter
43-1634280 EIN

costs of obesity related health problems are enormous, and include disability, lost wages and tax revenue, absenteeism, and increased medical costs. Social costs have been identified that indicate obese people are less likely to get jobs, apartments, go to college and are more likely to miss work costing employers in the USA over \$4 billion a year.

Faced with the growing scope and severity of the obesity crisis, in particular its increasing prevalence among children, nonprofits are trying to tackle the problem. Challenges include identifying toxic environments that foster overeating and sedentary lifestyles, trying to reach consensus on effective strategies to combat obesity, and attract funding. Donors are contributing to efforts to reduce obesity, notably through greater and more varied contributions to health research and education. The obesity “epidemic” can be prevented and nonprofits, companies, health professionals and governments are all engaged in educating the public about maintaining a healthy lifestyle. So what exactly is being done?

What are Nonprofits Doing?

Amongst initiatives to reduce and ultimately prevent obesity, nonprofits are playing their part through contributions to advance research and support campaigns to raise public awareness and promote healthy lifestyles. Many nonprofits are focusing their efforts on children, given the rapid rise in child obesity rates. For example, in the United States, a recent initiative by the ‘Alliance for a Healthier Generation’ (profiled below) proposes comprehensive health benefits for overweight children, including coverage for regular dietician visits and obesity education for parents.

Many U.S. grant makers are pursuing partnerships with the private sector as well as creating cross-sector coalitions.⁸ In Europe, consumer protection and health NGOs have joined forces with organizations representing the food and advertising industries to form the ‘European Platform for Action on Diet and Physical Activity.’ Through a multi-sector forum, the EU Platform will tackle the issues of obesity, poor nutrition, declining levels of physical activity, and their related problems.

Here, we take a look at several grantmakers working to combat obesity and promote healthier lifestyles.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

‘Johnson & Johnson’ is a name known worldwide for its health and medical products. One of their goals is to reverse the childhood obesity epidemic by 2015; to achieve this; the Foundation has pledged \$500 million to fight childhood obesity over five years. To learn more about the Johnson Foundation’s programs, visit www.rwjf.org.

The International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO), a UK registered nonprofit, is an umbrella organization of over fifty member groups (representing fifty-six countries), all working for improved global understanding of obesity through scientific research and dialogue. For more information, visit www.iaso.org.

William J. Clinton Foundation and the Alliance for a Healthier Generation After leaving the White House, former U.S. President Bill Clinton created a foundation to tackle a series of pressing, global issues - global climate change, HIV/AIDS in the developing world, childhood obesity and economic opportunity in the United States, and economic development in Africa and Latin America. To learn more about the Foundation, and the ‘Alliance for a Healthier Generation,’ visit www.clintonfoundation.org or www.healthiergeneration.org.

CAF Russia partnered with a corporate donor to educate Russian children on healthy eating habits, with a special emphasis on the importance of breakfast, and the benefits of physical activity. In its first year, the ‘Be Healthy’ program reached 164 third graders in the Leningrad region, near the donors coffee plant. The following year, 2008, the program expanded to include six additional schools. Program elements include activities to encourage healthy eating and physical activity, such as classes on how to grow vegetables in school gardens and how to prepare healthy breakfasts and on researching food chemistry in the school laboratory. To learn more about the ‘Be Healthy’ program, visit CAF Russia at <http://www.cafrussia.ru/eng/>.

How Can YOU Help?

Over the past few decades, health philanthropy has grown tremendously. For example, health grantmaking now accounts for nearly a quarter of all foundation giving, behind only education, and nearly \$4.4 billion annually.⁹ One of the biggest changes over the past twenty years has been the increased dispersion of grants towards public health.¹⁰ Today, donors are giving more to support health-related causes and are giving to causes more varied than the standbys of hospital construction and biomedical research. However, charitable giving to combat obesity lags behind top-funded health-related causes such as the fight against HIV/AIDS and smoking prevention (based on National Institutes of Health Funding).¹¹

If you are a donor eager to give to a health field, consider supporting an obesity-related issue or nonprofit.

Here, some ways to do so, both locally and globally:

- **Diversify your giving.** Obesity can lead to serious health consequences, including diabetes and heart disease. Consider funding organizations working to support research or treatment for an obesity-linked condition or illness. Also consider organizations and initiatives that stress nutrition and fitness.
- **Understand the “double burden.”**¹² Obesity is emerging as a problem in many developing countries where a “double burden” of obesity and malnutrition is growing.
- **Create a partnership.** Private, nonprofit and government partnerships are increasingly common and can be an effective way to combat obesity. Consider sponsoring a charitable organization working on the issue of obesity. To discover our database of eligible nonprofits, visit us at www.cafamerica.org.

Fighting Obesity with CAFAmerica

Oxford Health Alliance, United Kingdom

The Oxford Health Alliance (OxHA) focuses on preventing and reducing the global impact of chronic diseases. By supporting collaborations between experts and activists from different fields, OxHA aims to raise awareness and prompt action around three major risk factors - tobacco use, physical inactivity, and poor diet.

One of OxHA’s groundbreaking programs targets public health research, and more specifically aims to enhance scientific knowledge about the effectiveness of community interventions in reducing the prevalence of chronic diseases. The program Community Interventions for Health assesses what is needed to prevent obesity, tobacco use, and related diseases in various communities and is adapted to different cultures. The program will be implemented in China, England, India, and Mexico, over a three year period, with the support of a \$5.2 million grant from a corporate donor.

To learn more about this program, and other OxHA projects, visit their website at www.oxha.org.

Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados

In Barbados, heart disease is the leading cause of death – a condition closely linked to obesity. In addition, it is one of the fattest countries in the world with obesity affecting nearly three quarters of the population (69.7%).¹³ For nearly 15 years, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Barbados (HSFB) has been working to reverse this situation, both by keeping Barbadians healthy and aiding those who are suffering from heart disease or a stroke. HSFB programs include both scientific and medical initiatives and public education and awareness programs. HSFB promotes healthy lifestyles, notably through annual seminars, health fairs, hosting Barbados Heart Week, and running Health Heart Clubs for primary school children. To learn more about HSFB and their activities, visit them at www.hsfbarbados.org.

British Diabetic Association (Diabetes UK), United Kingdom

Diabetes UK is the largest organization of its kind in the United Kingdom. Obesity is a major risk factor behind diabetes and the majority of people diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes, (the most common form of diabetes) are overweight.¹⁴ In an effort to raise awareness of the risk factors of diabetes, and encourage those at risk to be tested, Diabetes UK launched the, "Measure Up" campaign. Through quick waist measurements, and review of other risk factors including physical activity level and fruit and vegetable intake, 'Measure Up' provides a risk assessment of developing diabetes over the next decade. In 2009, Diabetes UK took the 'Measure Up' campaign on the road to over 100 locations in the UK. As part of their on-the-road diabetes awareness campaign, the 'Measure Up Roadshow' will highlight the link between Type 2 diabetes and a person's waist measurement. To learn more about the 'Measure Up' campaign and other Diabetes UK programs, visit them at www.diabetes.org.uk.

Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation, Australia

Success at the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation can be measured by simple things: a pesto made from homegrown basil, an unexpected sprout in an herb garden, or the shared enjoyment of a nutritious meal made from fresh, seasonal products. The Kitchen Garden Foundation stresses hands on activities in a kitchen and garden in a classroom environment, so that young children are exposed to fresh seasonal products while learning about teamwork and environmental sustainability.

The Kitchen Garden Foundation has "come a long way" from its beginnings as one pilot project in 2001 to a national program today.¹⁵ Last year, the organization

extended their food education philosophy nationwide in an effort to develop life-long healthier and happier eating habits in a new generation of Australians and has since spread to 190 new schools. To learn more about the Kitchen Garden Foundation, visit their website at www.kitchengardenfoundation.org.au.

To give to any of the organizations listed here or another international charity of your choice visit CAFAmerica at: <http://www.cafamerica.org/dnn/Home/DonateNow/tabid/148/Default.aspx>

Resources

Financing Childhood Obesity Prevention Programs: Federal Funding Sources and Other Strategies. The Finance Project, September 2004. This resource on funding for children obesity prevention initiatives focuses on federal funding and innovative ways that such funding has been used. Though mainly geared for state and community policy makers, this is also a useful guide for nonprofits looking for new information on funding sources as well as grantmakers who want to educate themselves about the field of childhood obesity. To read this guide, visit <http://www.financeproject.org/publications/obesityprevention.pdf>.

Reversing the Obesity Epidemic: Policy Strategies for Health Funders. Grantmakers in Health, February 2007. Issue Brief No. 28. This report follows a Grantmaker in Health discussion about the policy strategies needed to reverse the current obesity epidemic. The brief includes a summary of the economic and health costs of obesity, the reasons behind policy changes, and case studies of health grantmakers in various sectors. To download this report, visit http://www.gih.org/usr_doc/Reversing_the_Obesity_Epidemic_no_28.pdf.

Websites

American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org

American Society of Bariatric Physicians
www.asbp.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Overweight and Obesity"
www.cdc.gov/obesity/

European Association for the Study of Obesity (EASO)
www.easoobesity.org

HOPE, Health Promotion Through Obesity Prevention Across Europe
www.hopeproject.eu

National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, NIH
www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Obesity Action Coalition,
www.obesityaction.org

The Obesity Society
www.obesity.org

RTI Obesity Cost Calculator, National Business Group on Health
www.businessgrouphealth.org/healthtopics/obesitycostcalculator.cfm

Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity
www.yaleruddcenter.org

Shaping America's Youth
www.shapingamericasyouth.org

STOP Obesity Alliance
www.stopobesityalliance.org

Weight-control Information Network
<http://win.niddk.nih.gov/index.htm>

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⁹ "Knowledge to Action: The Field of Health Philanthropy." Grantmakers in Health, 2007. Web. 6 Sep. 2009.

¹⁰ Dooley, Betty L, Catherine Jackson, Jeffrey Merrill, et al., "How Do Private Foundations Spend Their Money? A Description Of Health Giving." *Health Affairs* 2 (Fall 1983):104-14. *Health Affairs*. Quoted in "Knowledge to Action: The Field of Health Philanthropy." Grantmakers in Health, 2007. Web. 6 Sep. 2009.



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¹² "Obesity and Overweight." *Fact Sheet N.311*. World Health Organization. Sep. 2006. Web. 6 Sep. 2009.

¹³ Streib, Lauren. "World's Fattest Countries." *Forbes Magazine*. 2 Aug. 2007. Web. 13 Sep. 2009.

¹⁴ "Introduction to Diabetes: Causes and Risk Factors." Diabetes UK, 2008. Web. 23 Sep. 2009.

¹⁵ "We've Come a Long Way." *The Story So Far*. Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation. Web. 9 Oct. 2009.



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For More Information

If you or other donors would be interested in visiting any of the projects and/or charities mentioned in this brief, please contact CAFAmerica Chief Executive Officer, Susan Saxon-Harrold at 703-549-8931 or susansh@cafamerica.org

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King Street Station
1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 150
Alexandria, VA 22314-2840

(1) 703-549-8931 Phone
(1) 703-549-8934 Fax
info@cafamerica.org E-Mail
www.cafamerica.org Web
www.twitter.com/cafamerica Twitter