

Higher state health spending positively correlates to higher obesity rates, study finds

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Americans are gaining weight at an alarming rate, with obesity increasing from 12 percent of the nation's population in 1990 to 23 percent by 2005, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Despite an increase in state public health funding to combat these growing rates around the country, obesity continues to rise. A new University of Missouri study has found that as states spend more money on health care, obesity rates actually increase. Charles Menifield, a professor in the Truman School of Public Affairs at MU, says his findings strongly suggest that governmental spending efforts in fighting obesity have not been successful.

"Teenage pregnancy, tobacco use, infant mortality and the spread of AIDS have been decreasing for years, so clearly marketing and prevention campaigns can have a positive impact on reducing social ills," Menifield said. "However, current efforts toward decreasing obesity seem to be fighting an uphill battle."

In his study, Menifield examined the impact of per capita [healthcare expenditures](#), fruit and [vegetable consumption](#), and physical activity rates on obesity rates at the state level. He found that higher consumption of [fruits and vegetables](#) and physical activity directly correlated to lower obesity rates while higher rates of smoking correlated with higher [obesity rates](#). Menifield says these findings show that governmental programs must work toward solving many social problems at once, since they are often interrelated.

"The government cannot use a one-pronged approach to solving obesity," Menifield said. "They must use multiple avenues to solve the issue at every level of government. Obesity is clearly correlated with other social ills, like smoking, [low birth weight](#) and teen pregnancy; thus, the government should seek an agenda that seeks to reduce all of these social ills rather than focus on them individually."

Menifield recommends that policy makers address the problem many urban areas face regarding food deserts, which make it difficult for low-income families to acquire fresh fruits and vegetables. He also believes additional nutritional information should be provided on foods in grocery stores and restaurants, and employers can help by providing free or reduced gym memberships to employees.

Menifield's study was published in the *Association of Black Faculty Nursing Journal*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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