

England eyes expanding access to weight-loss drugs

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Doctors in England's state-run health service could soon be allowed to prescribe more people with obesity weight-loss drugs under a new pilot scheme, the government said Wednesday.

It hopes the two-year pilot will help cut waiting lists on the overstretched National Health Service (NHS), given obesity is a leading cause of severe health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer.

An official 2019 health survey in England estimated that over 12 million adults were living with obesity—28 percent of the population—while a further 16 million (36 percent) were overweight.

The [government](#) has been targeting obesity in recent years, introducing calorie labeling on menus and restricting the location of unhealthy foods in stores.

"Obesity puts huge pressure on the NHS," Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said in a statement unveiling the new £40 million (\$50 million) pilot.

"Using the latest drugs to support people to lose weight will be a game-changer by helping to tackle dangerous obesity-related health conditions," he said.

The move follows clinical trials that found treatments can help [obese adults](#) lose up to 15 percent of their [body weight](#) when prescribed alongside diet, physical activity and behavioral support.

Earlier this year the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

(Nice) approved the use of one [appetite suppressant](#), Wegovy, but limited its availability to specialist services which are largely hospital-based.

Adults with a Body Mass Index (BMI) of at least 35 and one weight-related health condition, such as diabetes or [high blood pressure](#), are currently considered.

That makes around 35,000 people eligible for Wegovy.

The two-year pilot could significantly expand access to tens of thousands of further potential recipients, while other drugs are also under consideration in [clinical trials](#).

Sunak's office said the scheme will explore "how approved drugs can be made safely available to more people by expanding specialist weight management services outside of hospital settings."

That will include examining how GPs could safely prescribe weight-loss drugs and how the NHS could provide support in the community or digitally, it added.

However, NHS England is still negotiating a "secure long-term supply of the products at prices that represent value for money taxpayers," Downing Street warned.

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