

Childhood obesity grows annual health bill

7 August 2018



Monash University researchers have found that childhood obesity costs Australian taxpayers \$43.2 million annually. Credit: Monash University

Childhood obesity is costing Australian taxpayers \$43.2 million annually—not including the cost of hospital care—and will grow unless prevention programs are adopted, new research by Monash University shows.

The study, conducted by a team from Monash Business School's Centre for Health Economics – Dr. Nicole Black, Robert Hughes and Professor Andrew Jones – analysed data on 3458 children from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children linked to their Medicare records.

Compared to healthy weight children, overweight and obesity among 6 to 13-year-olds was found to cause an additional \$43.2 million in annual non-hospital costs incurred by Medicare. The additional annual cost per child caused by obesity is \$103 per year and for every overweight child is \$63 per year.

Dr. Black will appear at the Public Hearing for the Senate Committee into the Obesity Epidemic in Australia in Melbourne on Tuesday 7 August 2018.

"Previous studies have only looked at the [health](#)

[care costs](#) associated with obesity. This is the first study to determine the costs directly caused by it," Dr. Black said.

"The majority of these costs are due to more frequent visits to GPs and specialist doctors. And it is anticipated that total health care costs caused by obesity would be even greater if hospital and out-of-pocket expenses were also included."

The study also highlights the long-term costs attributed to [childhood obesity](#) by investigating how a higher body mass index (BMI) at ages 6 and 7 affects the health care costs incurred over the next eight years of their life.

Children with obesity face a higher risk of other serious health conditions including asthma, sleep apnoea, bone and joint problems, hypertension, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes and psychological problems.

Australia has the dubious honour of being the fifth most obese country of all nations in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), with one in four Australian children now overweight or obese.

"This critical research shows that the health care costs start in childhood and it provides clear evidence of the economic value of investing in childhood obesity [prevention programs](#)," Dr. Black said.

Provided by Monash University

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