

September 1, 2026
IFSO 2026 World Congress

The State of Obesity Care in Canada: Policy and Health System Recommendations

Dr. Sanjeev Sockalingam, MD, MHPE, FRCPC
Scientific Director, Obesity Canada
Psychosocial Director, UHN Bariatric Surgery and Medical Program
Professor of Psychiatry, University of Toronto
Senior Scientist, Chief Medical Officer & SVP Education, CAMH



Disclosures

- Research Grant Funding:
 - Brain Canada, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- Scientific Director, Obesity Canada



Delayed care costs people, systems, and the economy



Nearly
1 in 3
Canadian adults live with obesity¹



200+
health conditions associated with obesity²

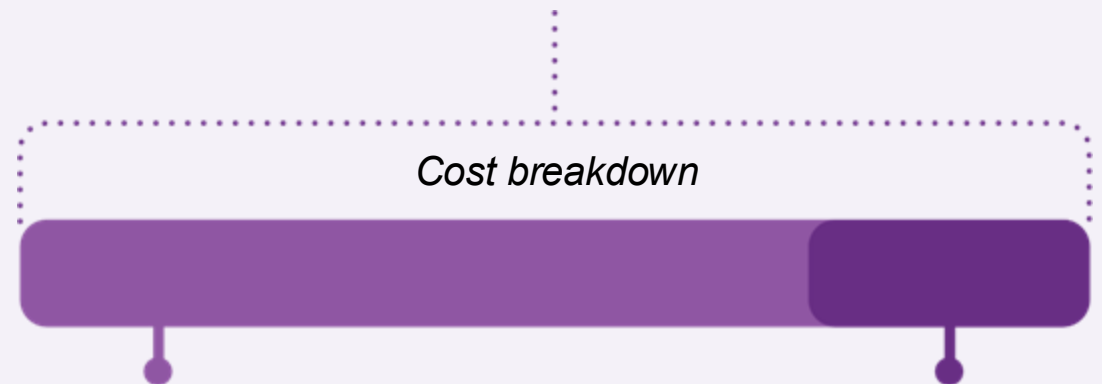
1- based on current BMI-based definitions

2- Yuen MMA. Health Complications of Obesity: 224 Obesity-Associated Comorbidities from a Mechanistic Perspective. *Gastroenterol Clin North Am.* 2023 Jun;52(2):363-380. doi: 10.1016/j.gtc.2023.03.006.

3- Chen, F., Sapra, T., Natale, Z. et al. Modeling the cost of inaction in treating obesity in Canada. *BMC Public Health* 25, 865 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-21905-2>

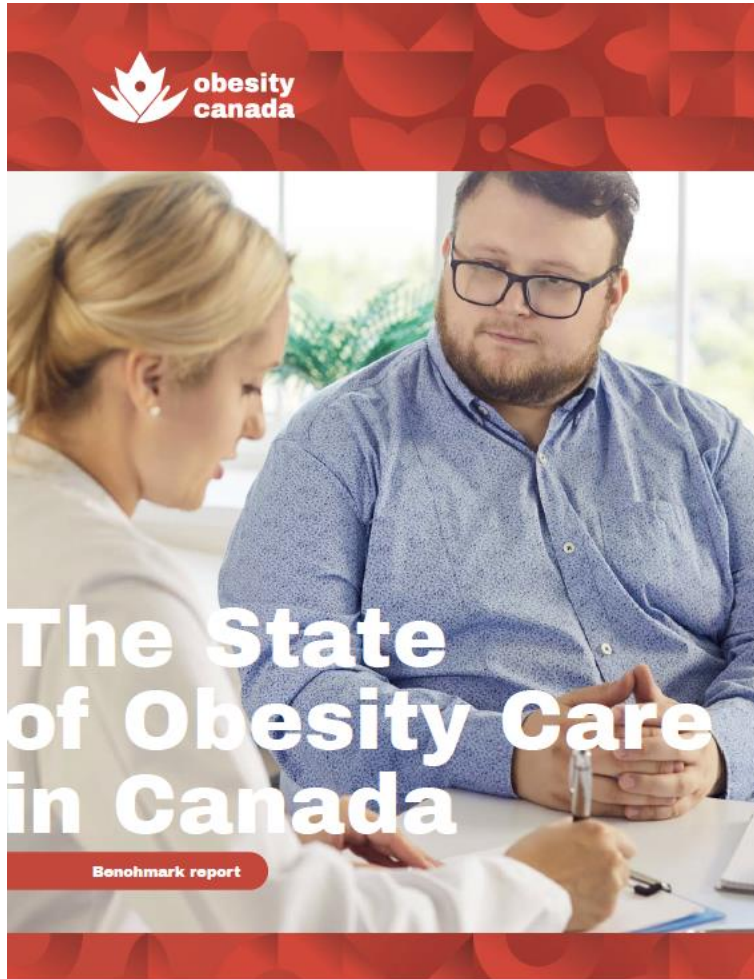


\$27.6B
estimated annual cost of
inaction in treating obesity
in Canada³



\$21.7 billion
in indirect costs

\$5.9 billion
in direct healthcare costs



Obesity Canada 2026

- The health system has not caught up with science & clinical guidance
- Examples:
 - Obesity is not assessed, diagnosed, or tracked like other chronic diseases
 - A treatment may be clinically indicated, but not covered by public or private health plans
 - A healthcare professional may want to help, but lacks the training, tools, time or referral pathways to provide obesity care
 - Psychological support may be recommended but out of reach



Five connected gaps are holding back better obesity care in Canada

Each gap affects whether obesity care is recognized, planned, funded and delivered as chronic disease care.

1 Canada does not measure what matters

Obesity is not consistently defined, diagnosed, tracked or monitored as a chronic disease. Current systems provide limited information on treatment access, quality of care and patient outcomes.

2 Access to primary care does not mean access to obesity care

Evidence-informed assessment, treatment and referral pathways are not consistently available in primary care.

3 Access to surgery depends too much on where a person lives

Eligibility criteria, wait times, pre-surgical support and long-term follow-up vary widely across Canada.

4 Obesity medication use is rising, but coverage is not

Access often depends on income, private insurance coverage and benefits-plan design rather than clinical need.

5 Psychological care is essential, but often invisible

Psychological and behavioural support remain underfunded, difficult to access and poorly measured, despite being core components of comprehensive obesity care.

Six recommendations to move obesity care forward

1

Recognize obesity as a chronic disease across policy and systems

2

Modernize obesity measurement and surveillance beyond BMI

3

Integrate obesity care into primary care and chronic disease pathways

4

Scale obesity education and practical tools for healthcare professionals

5

Fund comprehensive, evidence-based obesity care

6

Reduce bias across healthcare, policy, and public systems

The future we can build for Canadians living with obesity

Better obesity care means people can expect care that is:



Recognized and treated as a chronic disease in policy, health programs, standards of care, and public discourse



Measured through consistent data on diagnosis, treatment access, outcomes, and inequities across jurisdictions



Connected across care pathways, embedded in primary care and chronic disease programs, with coordinated, multidisciplinary support



Funded through public and private coverage policies based on clinical need and CPG-aligned treatment options



Respectful, person-centred and weight-bias-aware care designed alongside people living with obesity



Learn more at
obesitycanada.ca