Introduction

The global epidemic of an overweight and obese population and the associated diet-related chronic diseases is a major public health problem in many parts of the world. The prevalence of obesity has more than doubled since 1980, both worldwide and in Australia. In 2011-12, 62.7% of Australians aged 18 years and over were overweight or obese, with a similar proportion of 62.1% for the Northern Territory (NT) population. In 2009, overweight and obesity was estimated to contribute to 11.1% of the total NT Burden of Disease (BoD) and was ranked as the second leading risk factor in the study. Overweight and obesity increases the risk of developing a range of medical conditions including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, some cancers, renal disease, and arthritis, each of which is a major cause of morbidity, mortality and health expenditure.

This fact sheet provides an overview of the prevalence and distribution of overweight and obesity among the NT population.

Definition of overweight and obesity (adults)

Overweight and obesity are defined as excess fat accumulation that may impair health. Body Mass Index (BMI) is a simple index of weight-for-height that is commonly used to classify overweight and obesity in adults. It is defined as a person’s weight in kilograms divided by the square of his height in metres (kg/m²).

The WHO definition is:
- a BMI greater than or equal to 25 is overweight and
- a BMI greater than or equal to 30 is obese.

BMI provides the most useful population-level measure of overweight and obesity as it is consistent for both sexes and for all ages of adults. However, it should be considered as a guide only because of the variability in fat distribution and muscle mass between individuals with the same BMI result.

Data sources

The major sources for the following information are the ABS 2011-12 Australian Health Survey (AHS) and ABS 2012-13 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (AATSIHS).

In these two surveys height and weight were measured and then used to determine a person’s BMI. BMI data from the 2012–13 surveys are not comparable to previous ABS AATSIHS or AHS findings, in which BMI estimates were based on self-reported height and weight which are known to be less accurate than measured results.

Children aged 2-17 years

In 2011-12, the prevalence of overweight and obesity among NT children aged 2 to 17 years was 23.5%, slightly lower than the Australian level for children of the same age (25.1%). The prevalence of overweight and obesity among NT Indigenous children (23.0%) was similar to NT non-Indigenous children (23.8%; Table 1).

Table 1: Overweight/obesity prevalence (%) among Australian and NT children, aged 2-17 years, by sex and Indigenous status (NT only)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Indigenous</th>
<th>Non-Indigenous</th>
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<th>Australia</th>
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<td>18.1</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Person</td>
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<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 BMI for children are derived from the International Obesity Taskforce cut-off points, sourced from Cole et al, Establishing a standard definition for child overweight and obesity worldwide: international survey, 2000. (a) Reported crude rates from AATSIHS and AHS. (b) Based on Indigenous and non-Indigenous estimates from AATSIHS and AHS.

Adults aged 18 years and over

In 2011-12, 60.1% of Territorians were overweight or obese and the proportion was higher in males (63.4%) than females (56.5%). The Australian prevalence was similar at 62.8% and also higher in males than females (69.7% for males and 55.7% for females). This pattern was reversed in the NT Indigenous population with a higher proportion of overweight and obesity in females (61.5%) compared to males (53.0%; Table 2).

The NT prevalence of overweight and obesity increased with age in non-Indigenous males and females and Indigenous females, however it fell in Indigenous males aged 45 years and over (Figure 1). Non-Indigenous males had a higher prevalence of overweight and obesity than non-Indigenous females in all age-groups. By contrast, Indigenous females had a higher prevalence than Indigenous males for the age groups aged 25 years and over.
The prevalence of overweight/obesity was higher for Indigenous females than Indigenous males (66.1% and 56.6% respectively) but higher for non-Indigenous males than non-Indigenous females (68.1% and 55.8% respectively; Table 3).

### References


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