

The Cost of Obesity to U.S. Cities

A looming problem for city leaders: Healthcare costs are stifling the businesses that stimulate jobs and growth

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City leaders across the country face tight budgets, decreasing revenues, and unemployment challenges. And, as Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index data reveal, they also face another looming problem: high obesity rates that are accompanied with astronomical healthcare costs.

Obesity's healthcare costs aren't distributed equally across the nation, and definitely not across U.S. cities.

According to its 2009 studies of 187 U.S. metro areas, Gallup estimates that the direct costs associated with obesity and related chronic conditions are about \$50 million per 100,000 residents annually in cities with the highest rates of obesity. The direct and additional hidden costs of obesity are stifling businesses and organizations that stimulate jobs and growth in U.S. cities.

Losing weight, gaining savings

Obesity's healthcare costs are not distributed equally across the nation, and definitely not across U.S. cities. The majority of cities Gallup studied need to cut their obesity rates by at least a quarter to come close to the national goal of 15% set by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Cities with the highest rates of obesity need to cut their rates by more than half.

From a cost savings perspective, if *all* 187 cities reduced their obesity rates to 15%, the U.S. could save \$32.6 billion in healthcare costs annually. Additionally, if the nation's 10 most obese cities cut their rates to the national 2009 average of 26.5%, they could collectively save nearly \$500 million in healthcare costs each year. Cut to 15%, the cost savings would climb to nearly \$1.3 billion annually.

Gallup is able to calculate the incremental cost of healthcare per year for each of these cities by multiplying the estimated additional direct annual healthcare costs for an obese person (\$1,429 per person per year) by the population, then multiplying that by the obesity rate. A city of 100,000 citizens with a 20% obesity rate, for example, will have an incremental healthcare cost of \$28,580,000 ($\$1,429 \times 100,000 \times 0.20 = \$28,580,000$).

Twenty-one metro areas -- led by Montgomery, Alabama and Stockton, California -- earned the unhappy distinction of having obesity rates of 31% or higher in 2009, based on their residents' self-reported height and weight. In the 10 most obese cities, where at least one-third of residents reported a body mass index (BMI) higher than 30, the annual obesity cost per 100,000 residents was about \$50 million. This is roughly twice the cost per 100,000 residents in the least obese cities. (See graphic "The 10 Most Obese U.S. Cities and Associated 2009 Healthcare Costs.")

The 10 Most Obese U.S. Cities and Associated 2009 Healthcare Costs

In 2009, 21 U.S. metro areas had obesity rates of 31% or higher, based on their residents' self-reported height and weight. In the 10 most obese U.S. cities, where at least one-third of residents reported a body mass index (BMI) higher than 30, the annual obesity cost per 100,000 residents was about \$50 million. This is roughly twice the cost per 100,000 residents in the least obese cities.

Metropolitan Statistical Area	Population estimate 2009	% Obese	Annual obesity cost per 100,000 residents	Total annual obesity cost
Montgomery, AL	366,401	34.6	\$49,443,400	\$181,161,112
Stockton, CA	674,860	34.6	\$49,443,400	\$333,673,729
Visalia-Porterville, CA	429,668	34.1	\$48,728,900	\$209,372,490
York-Hanover, PA	428,937	34.0	\$48,586,000	\$208,403,331
Flint, MI	424,043	33.9	\$48,443,100	\$205,419,575
McAllen-Edinburg-Mission, TX	741,152	33.7	\$48,157,300	\$356,918,792
Bakersfield, CA	807,407	33.6	\$48,014,400	\$387,671,627
Lynchburg, VA	247,447	33.0	\$47,157,000	\$116,688,582
Huntington-Ashland, WV-KY-OH	285,624	33.0	\$47,157,000	\$134,691,710
Kingsport-Bristol-Bristol, TN-VA	305,629	32.9	\$47,014,100	\$143,688,724

Source: Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

Among the 11 cities with obesity rates lower than 20%, four are in Colorado. One of these cities, Denver, still spent an estimated \$704 million in preventable healthcare costs in 2009 because of its 19.3% obesity rate. But its healthcare costs would have been \$262 million higher if its obesity rate matched the national average. (See graphic "The 11 Least Obese U.S. Cities and Associated 2009 Healthcare Costs.")

The 11 Least Obese U.S. Cities and Associated 2009 Healthcare Costs

Among the 11 U.S. cities with obesity rates lower than 20%, four are in Colorado. One of these cities, Denver, spent an estimated \$704 million in preventable healthcare costs in 2009 because of its 19.3% obesity rate. But its healthcare costs would have been \$262 million higher if its obesity rate matched the national average.

Metropolitan Statistical Area	Population estimate 2009	% Obese	Annual obesity cost per 100,000 residents	Total annual obesity cost
Fort Collins-Loveland, CO	298,382	16.0	\$22,864,000	\$68,222,060
Boulder, CO	303,482	16.6	\$23,721,400	\$71,990,179
Barnstable Town, MA	221,151	16.9	\$24,150,100	\$53,408,188
Colorado Springs, CO	626,227	17.2	\$24,578,800	\$153,919,082
San Luis Obispo-Paso Robles, CA	266,971	17.6	\$25,150,400	\$67,144,274
Reno-Sparks, NV	419,261	17.7	\$25,293,300	\$106,044,943
Santa Cruz-Watsonville, CA	256,218	17.9	\$25,579,100	\$65,538,258
San Jose-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA	1,839,700	19.0	\$27,151,000	\$499,496,947
San Francisco-Oakland-Fremont, CA	4,317,853	19.2	\$27,436,800	\$1,184,680,692
Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT	901,208	19.3	\$27,579,700	\$248,550,463
Denver-Aurora, CO	2,552,195	19.3	\$27,579,700	\$703,887,724

Source: Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

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