

MEDIA RELEASE

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Obesity is sending over-45s to hospital – at a cost of \$4 billion per year

One in every six days spent in Australian hospitals is related to overweight and obesity among the over-45s, costing the nation nearly \$4 billion a year, new research shows.

The research, which looked at the hospital records of more than 200,000 people aged 45–79 participating in the Sax Institute's 45 and Up Study, has unearthed a level of detail on overweight and obesity and hospital use not previously available. It will be presented at today's annual 45 and Up Study meeting in Sydney.

"There are a lot of broad estimates on how much overweight and obesity costs hospitals and other health services but very little hard evidence linked to real people. The results we are presenting today shed new light on the impact this problem is having on the health system – and they indicate a greater impact than previously thought," said lead researcher Dr Rosemary Korda, from the Australian National University. "

Dr Korda and her colleagues from ANU, University of Western Sydney, University of Sydney and the Sax Institute, found that once a person becomes overweight, there is a direct link between increases in their body mass index (BMI) and their chances of being admitted to hospital, the number of days spent in hospital and the cost to the health system.

"For example those with a BMI of 40-50 (extremely obese) had more than double the rate of admissions and days in hospital – and cost the system more than double – than those with a BMI of 23-25 (normal weight)," Dr Korda said.

"Of course we didn't look at younger people, but it is likely that similar patterns exist among younger adults and possibly children. It's also likely that use of other healthcare resources such as primary care and pharmaceuticals increase in a similar way with increasing BMI."

Given that that 63% of Australian adults are overweight or obese, and this proportion continues to grow, it would be fair to say that the likely future cost to the health system is extremely concerning."

45 and Up Study Director and co-author of the research, Professor Emily Banks, said the results showed that overweight and obesity was not just a burden for people struggling with their weight, but a large burden for the health system as a whole.

"It's clear from these results that if we don't do something to stem the rise in overweight and obesity, then healthcare costs will continue to increase more than they need to," Professor Banks said. "Even small reductions in the level of overweight and obesity could result in considerable savings to the health system."

Key statistics

Among 45-79 year olds, overweight and obesity accounts for:

- One in eight hospital admissions (13% of admissions)
- One in every six days spent in hospital (18% of hospital days)
- One in every six dollars spent on hospitalisation (17% of hospital costs).

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45 and Up Study partners:

