

Austria: Obesity Health System



Economic classification



High Income¹

Health system summary

Austria's public healthcare is primarily delivered through a statutory health insurance (SHI) scheme that covers employees and their non-working dependents. Enrolment into an employer's insurance scheme is compulsory and so employees are usually enrolled automatically on starting new employment. The self-employed, on the other hand, must enrol into the public health insurance scheme. Under the SHI, only certain services are covered and those that are not are paid for 'out of pocket' (OOP). Individuals can also choose to visit non-SHI physicians and clinics at their own expense. The lack of coverage and insufficient treatment options provided under SHI results in high OOP expenses - in 2017, OOP expenses made up 19.2% of health expenditure.²

Many Austrians have supplementary private insurance to coincide with the SHI scheme. In 2013, 35% of the population was estimated to have such insurance.³

Does Austria's government define 'Obesity as a disease'?



Does Austria's healthcare provider(s) define 'Obesity as a disease'?



In practice, how is obesity treatment largely funded?



Is there specialist training available dedicated to the training of health professionals to prevent, diagnose, treat and manage obesity?



(●: Government, ●: Insurance, ●: Out of pocket expense, ●: Unknown)

Have any taxes or subsidies been put in place to protect/assist/inform the population around obesity?



Are there adequate numbers of trained health professionals in specialties relevant to obesity in urban areas?



Are there any obesity-specific treatment recommendations or guidelines published for adults?



Are there adequate numbers of trained health professionals in specialties relevant to obesity in rural areas?



Are there any obesity-specific treatment recommendations or guidelines published for children?



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Obesity prevalence

10.7%	13.4%
Women	Men
8.0%	10.3%
Girls	Boys

Overweight prevalence

20.6%	37.2%
Women	Men
17.9%	17.7%
Girls	Boys

Key prevention policies

- ⇒ Voluntary guidelines for school in foods

Summary of stakeholder feedback*

Obesity is not considered to be a disease by either the government or the healthcare providers in Austria. Instead, there is reportedly a lot of stigma against the individuals with obesity as it is assumed to be a result of personal failure.

As obesity is not a priority, there is limited infrastructure within the healthcare system for obesity prevention, management and treatment. There is also limited coverage by social insurance schemes for treatment and so most patients must fund treatment as an 'out of pocket' expense. Stakeholders said there is an exception for severe obesity, for which treatment (surgery) is available. Follow-up of bariatric surgery is however, said to be insufficient.

There is a lack of specialist obesity professionals in both urban and rural areas.

**Based on interviews/survey returns from 2 stakeholders*

Perceived barriers to treatment



Obesity not recognised as a disease



Lack of financial investment and funding for coverage



Poor health literacy & behavior



Lack of training for healthcare professionals



Fragmented or failing health system

References

1. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-country-classifications-income-level-2019-2020> (last accessed 29.08.19)
2. https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/state/docs/2019_chp_at_english.pdf (Last accessed 07.04.2020)
3. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10198-019-01113-7> (Last accessed 07.04.2020)

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