

Sri Lanka: Obesity Health System



Economic classification



Upper Middle Income¹

Health system summary

Sri Lanka's public health sector has traditionally provided the bulk of healthcare in the country (despite health expenditure being evenly split between the public and private sector). This state-financed system provides free at point of service care for curative and preventative services, and is widely praised for recent improvements in health indicators such as maternal and infant mortality. However, despite the existence of this public coverage, out of pocket expenditure remains high, making up 38% of total health expenditure.² The private sector in Sri Lanka is flourishing as people increasingly seek care privately due to the underfunded and stretched public system.

Like elsewhere, Sri Lanka is being challenged by an ageing population and the increasing burden of chronic and non-communicable diseases (that are now estimated to contribute to 75% of deaths).³ The health system to date has done well in providing near- universal coverage, but these new challenges threaten continued progress. In late 2019, the Sri Lankan prime minister announced government plans to establish a national health insurance scheme.

Does Sri Lanka's government define 'Obesity as a disease'?



Does Sri Lanka'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

6.7%	12.3%
Women	Men
UNK%	UNK%
Girls	Boys

Overweight prevalence

22.5%	31.8%
Women	Men
UNK%	UNK%
Girls	Boys

Key prevention policies

- ⇒ Traffic light labelling system for drinks

Summary of stakeholder feedback*

Stakeholders report that there is some recognition of obesity as a disease (especially by the Ministry of Health). Work underway to address obesity includes traffic-light food labelling, community-led health promotion and school-based programmes. All stakeholders felt that obesity could be better prevented by encouraging people to do more physical activity.

There is also a broad focus on non-communicable diseases (NCD). There is an NCD prevention clinic in every hospital and there is an NCD council chaired by the Minister of Health that reviews interventions. However, while BMI is routinely measured in Sri Lanka, it is said that it is not typical for obesity to be treated. When treatment is offered, it is often paid for by a mix of government, insurance and out of pocket expenditure - and only when the individual has comorbidities or complications.

Although there are no obesity treatment guidelines from any governmental organisations, the Sri Lankan College of Endocrinologists have published treatment guidelines for adults and children. Allegedly, most healthcare professionals are not aware of the existence of these guidelines.

**Based on interviews/survey returns from 3 stakeholders*

Perceived barriers to treatment

 High cost of out of pocket payments

 Poor adherence to and fear of treatment

 Obesity is considered a sign of wealth

 Lack of support

 Lack of opportunity for physical activity

References

1. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-country-classifications-income-level-2019-2020> (last accessed 29.08.2019)
2. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/01/23/sri-lanka-and-world-bank-partner-to-improve-healthcare-services> (last accessed 20.12.19)
3. http://www.health.gov.lk/moh_final/english/public/elfinder/files/publications/2018/ReorgPrimaryHealthCare.pdf (last accessed 20.12.2019)

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