

Brazil: Obesity Health System



Economic classification



Upper Middle Income¹

Health system summary

Brazil has a universal, publicly funded healthcare system that is known as the *Sistema Único de Saúde* (SUS). SUS is funded by taxes and contributions from government (at a federal, state and municipal level). The private sector currently services approximately 25% of the population, as many individuals having the option to purchase insurance plans via their employer or individually (with many receiving tax relief on these payments).

It is widely reported that there is great disparity in treatment availability and quality between public and private healthcare, and so it seems that those that can afford private healthcare purchase it. As a result, out of pocket expenditure in Brazil remains high.

Where is Brazil's government in the journey towards defining 'Obesity as a disease'?



Where is Brazil's healthcare provider in the journey towards defining 'Obesity as a disease'?



In practice, how is obesity treatment largely funded?



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

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



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



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 urban areas?



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



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



Brazil: Obesity Health System



Obesity prevalence

24.4%	16.8%
Women	Men
7.6%	9.2%
Girls	Boys

Overweight prevalence

34.5%	39.7%
Women	Men
17.6%	16.6%
Girls	Boys

Key prevention policies

- ⇒ Mandatory nutrient lists on packaged food
- ⇒ Restrictions on food marketing to children and adolescents
- ⇒ Food/nutrition standards in the national school meal programme

Summary of stakeholder feedback*

It appears that although obesity is considered a public health priority in Brazil, there is little government action. Obesity is commonly seen as a lifestyle issue and treatment options are limited.

In the public system it appears that only bariatric surgery is covered, meaning that comprehensive treatment and management is only available in the private sector. Costs for private care, however, is unaffordable for most of the Brazilian population, so only the wealthiest can afford obesity-related treatments. *Associação Brasileira para o Estudo da Obesidade* are currently working towards the approval for obesity medications through the SUS healthcare scheme, which will hopefully make them more affordable. One stakeholder reported that obesity medication is difficult to get privately too, with private insurers rarely funding it.

While a national strategy on NCDs exists, stakeholders were unclear whether there is an accompanying implementation guide. There are also clinical guidelines for obesity treatment, but rate of uptake is reportedly low. In the public system it appears that patients need to a BMI ≥ 35 kg/m² with comorbidities (or ≥ 40 kg/m² without) to qualify for bariatric treatment but even then, there is a long waiting list. Treatment is said to be particularly difficult to access in the rural areas.

Overall, there are inadequate numbers of trained health professionals in specialties relevant to obesity, with there being little to no specialist training available. It was noted that although there are increasing numbers of training physicians, they do not have specific obesity training and so qualify ill-equipped to treat and manage obesity.

**Based on interviews/survey returns from 5 stakeholders*

Perceived barriers to treatment

- 🏛️ Lack of political will, interest and action
- ✖️ Influence of food industry
- 👨‍⚕️ Lack of training for healthcare professionals
- 👤 Poor health literacy & behavior
- 💊 Poor availability of pharmaceutical treatments
- ✖️ Obesity not recognised as a disease
- 💰 Lack of financial investment and funding for coverage
- 💵 High cost of out of pocket payments
- ⚠️ Failure to recognise or accept all treatment options
- 👤 Stigma
- 🌱 Obesogenic environment
- 🔍 Lack of evidence, monitoring and research
- 🏥 Lack of treatment facilities
- 👥 Lack of multi-disciplinary teams

References

1. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-country-classifications-income-level-2019-2020> (last accessed 29.08.2019)

Last updated October 2019