

# Lebanon: Obesity Health System



**Economic classification**

Upper Middle Income<sup>1</sup>

## Health system summary

Lebanon has a mixed health-care system. There is the government-funded National Social Security Fund, government schemes that cover civil servants and the military, and private insurance which together cover close to 50% of the population<sup>2</sup>. The many Palestinian refugees are covered by the United National Relief and Work Agency. It is estimated that around half of the population in Lebanon lack healthcare coverage, and for those that do have coverage, co-payments are common<sup>3</sup>. As a result, out of pocket payments in Lebanon are considered to be at 'catastrophic levels' (55%)<sup>4</sup>.

The public sector is considered to be of much lower quality than the private sector, suffering from low funding and difficulties with recruiting and retaining staff.

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



Where is Lebanon'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?



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## Obesity prevalence

27.5%	26.6%
Women	Men
6.9%	15.5%
Girls	Boys

## Overweight prevalence

31.4%	44.7%
Women	Men
19.7%	23.0%
Girls	Boys

## Key prevention policies

- ⇒ Food based dietary guidelines
- ⇒ Have piloted school-based interventions

## Summary of stakeholder feedback\*

Stakeholders felt that neither the government or the healthcare providers in Lebanon considered obesity as a disease. This was felt to be evidenced by the lack of initiatives and action on the obesity front in Lebanon for both prevention and treatment of obesity. It was felt that obesity could be better prevented if there were more awareness campaigns, government commitment and training for health professionals.

Not only is there a lack of guidelines in Lebanon, stakeholders reported that there are a lack of clear care pathways. This may be due to the absence of guidelines and/or the fact that primary care physicians do not have a gatekeeper role in Lebanon (people can go straight to specialists). No clear referral pathways mean that treatment is often left to endocrinologists and surgeons, with general practitioners playing a small (to no) role in obesity management and treatment.

It appears that most obesity treatment options are not covered by government funding/insurance - except for surgery when certain criteria are met - and so much treatment in Lebanon is paid for out of pocket. The lack of guidelines in Lebanon mean that there is variation in when treatment can be received, but it appears that it is generally when BMI is above 30kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

There is no obesity training available in Lebanon. Endocrinologists are widely considered to be the most qualified to manage and treat obesity, but they do not receive specific obesity training in their specialisation training.

*\*Based on interviews/survey returns from 4 stakeholders*

## Perceived barriers to treatment

- \$ High cost of out-of-pocket payments
- ✗ Obesity not recognised as a disease
- 🏠 Lack of financial investment and funding for coverage
- 🎓 Lack of training for healthcare professionals
- ⚠️ Failure to recognise all treatment options
- 📦 Poor availability of pharmaceuticals
- ➕ Poor adherence to treatment
- 🧠 Poor health literacy and behaviour
- 🌐 Cultural norms and traditions
- 🏠 Obesogenic environment

## References

1. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-country-classifications-income-level-2019-2020> (last accessed 29.08.2019)
2. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5234495/> (Last accessed 18.10.2019)
3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26022063> (Last accessed 18.1.2019)
4. <https://www.aub.edu.lb/k2p/Documents/K2P%20Evidence%20Summary%20Universal%20Health%20Coverage.pdf> (Last accessed 18.10.2019)

Last updated October 2019.