



Press Release

Northwest Health Foundation Releases Report on Obesity's Effect on Rising Medical Spending in Oregon from 1998 to 2005

Study shows 34% of the recent increase in Oregon's health expenses is related to obesity

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Portland, Ore. – April 6, 2009 – The Northwest Health Foundation has released a report commissioned from Dr. Kenneth Thorpe, Professor and Department Chair at the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University.

The key finding of the study is that 34% of the increase in Oregon's health expenditures between 1998 and 2005 can be attributed to rising obesity prevalence.

“This reminds us that the most powerful determinants of our health relate to our behaviors, not to medical care,” said Thomas Aschenbrener, Northwest Health Foundation president. “Behaviors such as smoking, poor diet, and lack of physical activity are making us sick, and we must focus on the environments that influence these behaviors.”

Examining data from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), Thorpe and associate Katya Galactionova analyzed healthcare spending, insurance status, medical care utilization and disease prevalence for the Oregon population.

The finding adds urgency to the following obesity-related trends in Oregon:

- Obesity costs Oregon at least \$781 million per year in direct medical expenses - over \$1 billion including indirect costs such as lost productivity and co-morbidities.
- Between 1990 and 2007, the prevalence of obesity in Oregon rose 140%.
- 61% of Oregon adults now meet the CDC definition of overweight or obese.
- In 2007, 25.9% of Oregon 8th graders are now overweight or obese, compared to 22.2% in 2001, a rise of 17%. Research has shown that four out of five overweight or obese children will become overweight or obese adults.

The study comes one week after the Oregon Department of Human Services released a comprehensive obesity prevention report recommending significant investments in a statewide, science-based obesity prevention program and an increase in funding for physical education in schools.

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Northwest Health Foundation is committed to advancing, supporting, and promoting the health of the people of Oregon and southwest Washington and achieves its mission through grant making and support for advocacy efforts influencing public policy.

More information:

www.nwhf.org

www.communityhealthpriorities.org