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Obesity in the United States: Public Perception of Causes, Solutions, and Consequences

Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research survey explores public understanding of the causes and consequences of obesity and its link to chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease

Chicago, January 4, 2013—The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research announces the publication and availability of a major survey that explores the American public’s understanding of the causes and consequences of obesity; the link between obesity and chronic health conditions including diabetes; and the role of government in addressing the nation’s obesity problems.

Significant findings include:

- The U.S. public considers obesity second only to cancer as the nation’s most serious health issue, with conditions closely related to obesity—diabetes and heart disease—tied for third.
- Eight out of ten people cite too much TV and computer time as the most important reason for high rates of obesity, with easy access to cheap fast food and lack of desire or knowledge about how to control one’s weight as other major factors.
- Discrimination is an issue, with 95 percent of the public believing that obese people face some level of discrimination due to their weight.
- There is wide public understanding of the connection between obesity and the health impacts of being overweight such as diabetes and heart disease.
- There is strong support for government policies that would add more time for physical activity in schools, provide information about healthy choices, and offer incentives to the food industry to produce healthier options.
- There is little support for policies that would constrain consumer choices such as limits on the amount or type of food that can be purchased or taxes on unhealthy foods or drinks.

“The American public has clearly gotten the message about obesity as a major public health issue, including its connection to other major health problems,” says Trevor Tompson, director of the AP-NORC Center. “What is less clear is consensus about how to address the issue and a



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surprising number of overweight people who are not told by their physicians that it is an issue that needs attention.”

Details of the survey are available on the AP-NORC website: www.apnorc.org.

About the Survey

The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research conducted a nationally representative household survey with more than 1,000 adults to measure the general public’s opinions about obesity and obesity-related health issues in the United States. The survey assessed how the public understands the reasons behind the rising rates of obesity in the U.S., the connection between obesity and health issues including diabetes, and the role of government in addressing obesity. The results provide insight into the public’s perception of the severity of the obesity problem and their feeling about where responsibility lies for implementing solutions.

Associated Press Stories

The Associated Press multi-format coverage of the study began on January 4, 2013 with an article titled "[Poll: Obesity's A Crisis But We Want Our Junk Food.](#)"

- **Survey Results, and The Associated Press stories related to the AP-NORC survey are available at www.apnorc.org.**

Methodology

The AP-NORC survey was conducted from November 21 through December 14, 2012. AP and NORC staff collaborated on all aspects of the study, with input from NORC’s Public Health Research department and AP’s subject matter experts. Telephone interviews were conducted with 1,011 adults age 18 or older, with 599 respondents on landlines and 412 on cellular telephones. The final response rate was 20 per cent with an overall margin of error of +/- 4.2 percent.

[NORC at the University of Chicago](#) is an independent research organization headquartered in downtown Chicago with additional offices in the University of Chicago campus, the D.C. Metro area, Atlanta, Boston, and San Francisco. NORC also supports a nationwide field staff as well as international research operations. With clients throughout the world, NORC collaborates with



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