



Philippine Association  
for the Study of  
Overweight and Obesity



**World Health Organization**  
Representative Office  
for the Philippines

## **WORLD OBESITY DAY JOINT MEDIA RELEASE**

**Everybody Needs to Act to Curb Obesity**

***DOH and development partners call for a whole-of-society approach  
to reduce obesity in the Philippines***

**MANILA, 4 MARCH 2022** – The Department of Health (DOH), National Nutrition Council (NNC), Philippine Association for the Study of Overweight and Obesity (PASOO), Nutrition Center of the Philippines (NCP), World Health Organization (WHO), and United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) raise the alarm on growing obesity in the Philippines on the occasion of World Obesity Day.

Globally, obesity affects 800 million individuals, placing them more at risk for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers. It has also emerged as a major risk factor for severe disease during the COVID-19 pandemic, making people living with obesity twice as likely to be hospitalized if tested positive for COVID-19.

Obesity, which was once considered a problem primarily in high-income and developed countries, is now a rising health problem in low- and middle- income countries including the Philippines.

Around 27 million Filipinos are overweight and obese, based on the latest survey of the Department of Science and Technology’s Food and Nutrition Research Institute. For the past two decades, overweight and obesity among adults has almost doubled from 20.2% in 1998 to 36.6% in 2019. Similarly, the prevalence rates of overweight and obesity among adolescents have more than doubled from 4.9% in 2003 to 11.6% in 2018.

If no action is taken, overall rates of overweight and obesity will continue to rise. It is projected that more than 30% of Filipino adolescents will be overweight and obese by 2030 (Landscape Analysis on Overweight and Obesity in Children, Philippines).

This year’s World Obesity Day on March 4 – with the theme “Everybody Needs to Act” – is a call for action at the local, national, and global levels to tackle the increasing rates of obesity, reduce the stigma faced by people living with obesity, and improve the systems that contribute to obesity around the world.

In the Philippines, multi-sectoral and multi-level actions are being undertaken as response to this call. The National Policy on Addressing Overweight and Obesity is being developed to provide directions and guidance to all stakeholders to curb obesity using population-based approaches for prevention, regulatory mechanisms to influence the food environment, management of existing cases and research and surveillance. It considers double-duty actions that address both under- and overnutrition.

According to NNC's Executive Director Asst. Secretary Azucena M. Dayanghirang, "The NNC coordinates the Philippine Plan of Action for Nutrition (PPAN) which includes the Overweight and Obesity Prevention and Management Program to promote healthy environments in priority settings including communities, schools, and workplaces. Also, the NNC Governing Board recently approved the Philippine Nutrient Profile Model, which will provide guidance in determining food and beverages that can be marketed to children and as the basis for front-of-pack labelling of food products. This tool is intended to influence food manufacturers to produce and reformulate to offer healthier food to consumers." The NNC will continue coordinating efforts among stakeholders to effectively address the growing concern on obesity through the formulation of the successor PPAN for 2023-2028.

From the private sector, PASOO and the Nutrition Center of the Philippines (NCP) promote research and multi-professional collaboration in the field of prevention and management of overweight and obesity. Local government units are also leading the way in promoting healthy eating and physical activity among individuals and communities. Quezon City passed Executive Order No. 16 S-2021 entitled "Quezon City Healthy Public Food Procurement Policy," which sets nutrition criteria for food procured and served by the city to increase the availability of healthy food among the local constituents. In similar fashion, Iloilo City implemented an urban health initiative to promote active transport and enhance physical activity in the city. In fact, it is one of the awardees of the Bike Lane Award of the Land Transportation Office.

To strategically address the growing problem of obesity in the Philippines, the DOH, NNC, and national partners recommend the following actions to be taken:

- Implement policies, legislation, and interventions to promote physical activity including active transport and promotion of green, blue, and open spaces in communities and workplaces
- Strengthen and sustain appropriate social and behavior change communication on healthy diet and physical activity
- Implement a package of policies and interventions to promote, protect, and support infant and young child nutrition, especially in the first 1000 days of life to prevent stunting and reduce risk for children to become obese in their later lives
- Develop a strategy with corresponding funds, human resources, and accountability mechanisms, including empowering the health system with dedicated programs on obesity across the life stage
- Improve data, monitoring, and enforcement of laws and introduce new legislation on marketing and labeling of food products

- Provide subsidies to farmers and fisherfolk and increase access to nutritious food
- Use social protection programs such as 4Ps to improve access to healthy food, especially in times of disasters
- Promote healthy school food environments for children

#### Statement from Department of Health

“The DOH recognizes the urgent need to address the increasing prevalence of overnutrition in the country. This is why for the past few years since the Universal Health Care Act, the DOH prioritizes nutrition and physical activity to reduce premature deaths due to non-communicable diseases, especially those attributable to dietary risks. The risk of being overweight and obese can also be attributed to both individual lifestyle choices and lack of supportive environments to make healthy choices such as *moving more* and *eating right*. Hence, interventions that address the social determinants of health, highlighting the need to integrate health in all public policies, to enable behavior change and create supportive environments must be put in place. We need to make healthier food options in communities, schools, and workplaces more available, affordable, and accessible to all Filipinos, and we must make our public infrastructure such as parks, roads and pathways be more conducive to physical activity and active mobility. We all have a part to play in reducing the burden of overnutrition in the country. It is through the synergistic efforts of stakeholders from all sectors of society that we will be able to attain our vision of a Healthy Pilipinas where the healthy choice is the easier choice for everyone, everywhere, every time.” Dr. Beverly Lorraine C. Ho, Director IV, Health Promotion Bureau and Disease Prevention and Control Bureau, DOH

#### Statement from PASOO

“Obesity is a global issue! However, in the Philippines, 36.6% of Filipinos 20 years old and above are either overweight or obese based on WHO BMI cutoff points (FNRI, 2019). The obesity issue is definitely closer to home. The FNRI nationwide survey further showed that 40.6% of Filipino adults were considered physically inactive in 2019. Imagine how many more were added during the COVID-19 pandemic! Let us prevent the rise in obesity. The person with obesity needs our help and empathic support. Management will need a team approach with the patient at the center. According to the WHO, the factors contributing to the increasing problem of obesity in the Philippines include poor diets, inadequate nutrition, failing food systems and limited physical activity. These problems need multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaborations and solutions. Everybody needs to act!” - Dr. Nemencio Nicodemus Jr., President of PASOO

#### Statement from NCP

The rapid increase in obesity among Filipino children and adolescents, more prevalent in the urban and peri-urban areas, is truly alarming. A healthy diet starts in the First 1,000 Days, with a pregnant mother taking adequate nutrients for her baby’s proper growth and development. Breastfed infants and young children have a lower risk of becoming overweight and obese. The

marketing of foods high in sugar, salt, and saturated fats targeted towards children, through all forms of media, must be regulated. Food systems should be geared towards providing affordable and accessible fresh produce. #everybodyneedstoact” - Dr. Mary Christine Castro, President of Nutrition Center of the Philippines

#### Statement from World Health Organization

“Obesity is a global and national challenge that we can only meet with a unified global and national response. We must work together across institutions and disciplines to provide practical solutions. We need to reform food systems, address the underlying causes of obesity, and help people achieve and maintain a healthy weight. We can fight obesity with public health tools to promote healthy diet and physical activity, financial and regulatory tools to make healthy diets more accessible and affordable, and clinical tools to provide quality care for children and adults who live with obesity. With public health tools, financial and regulatory tools and clinical tools, we can bring this devastating global and national disorder under control.” - Dr. Rajendra Prasad Yadav, Acting WHO Representative to the Philippines

#### Statement from UNICEF

“Children with unhealthy diets who take little exercise are increasingly prone to depression, underperforming at school and learning, and are at greater risk of debilitating disease like diabetes later in life. COVID-19 poses an additional threat to children with obesity. They are more likely to be hospitalized and have a higher likelihood of severe disease. We must overcome an obesity-promoting environment that entices children with junk food and offers few opportunities for physical activity. Adequate nutrition is a fundamental human right for every child and a pathway to a healthier future,” said Oyunsaikhan Dendevnorov, UNICEF Representative in the Philippines.

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