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Capital loses £900m a year to obesity and bill is rising fast

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14 Apr 2011

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Obesity is costing London nearly £900 million a year in treatment costs and loss of earnings, figures reveal today.

In the first report exposing the financial toll of the problem in the capital, it also emerged that the growing number of dangerously overweight children could rapidly take the bill above £1 billion.

Obese adults are costing the NHS in London £883.6 million each year, based on the cost of treatment and loss of earnings through illness and early death. Treating childhood obesity costs a further £7.1 million annually but experts say obese children will cost London's economy £111 million each year if they remain so into adulthood.

The cost of treatment, based on GP consultations, hospitals admissions and medicines prescribed for conditions caused by obesity, was calculated for the [London Assembly](#).

Primary care trusts in the capital spend £13 billion a year on health services, but face increasing demand and a squeeze on their finances.

The Assembly today called on [Boris Johnson](#) to step in to tackle the problem of obesity.

[James Cleverly](#), chairman of the health and public services committee, which published the findings, said: "We know now that treating childhood obesity already costs London millions of pounds, so something must be done to stop today's young people becoming obese adults."

The report says strategies such as encouraging walking, cycling, food growing and sports participation are not co-ordinated, and few focus exclusively on obesity-reduction.

Mr Cleverly said: "There is a strong case for the Mayor to intervene on this issue and we want to see a new obesity strategy for the capital.

"This will ensure action is taken in a co-ordinated way to address the different factors that set children on a path which has such damaging implications for them and society as a whole."

Childhood obesity levels in the capital are higher than the national average, with one in five youngsters classed as obese. In [Westminster](#), [Southwark](#), [Newham](#), [Tower Hamlets](#) and [Hackney](#), more than a quarter of 10 and 11-year-old children are obese. In contrast, 12 per cent of the same age group are obese in [Richmond](#).

The committee's research also analysed the effectiveness of various programmes to tackle obesity. It found lifestyle counselling by GPs and walk to school initiatives were least effective whereas weight managements programmes where children are made to exercise, mentored and educated on nutrition were more successful.

Obesity specialist and Harley Street surgeon [Shaw Somers](#) has warned the NHS is on the brink of "going bust" because of obesity, which costs the NHS £4.3 billion a year.

In 2009, Mr Johnson announced plans to tackle obesity as part of the draft health inequalities strategy. Measures included increasing access to health services and supporting workplace health schemes.

[Pamela Chesters](#), the Mayor's adviser for health and youth opportunities, said: "We share the Assembly's concerns about childhood obesity... we have introduced initiatives to increase physical activity and encourage healthier eating.

"He is confident that, together with London councils who co-sponsored the proposal to establish [the strategy], and health professionals, it will be possible to make real inroads into the health challenges affecting the capital, including childhood obesity."

Around £14 billion is spent each year on healthcare in London.

An [NHS London](#) spokesperson said: "The 2012 Games is the perfect opportunity to make Londoners more active. We are working with local authorities, voluntary organisations and the [Greater London Authority](#) to promote healthy living using the Games as an inspiration.

"We want to create a lasting health legacy, to improve their health and wellbeing and address health inequalities, particularly in the host boroughs."

Facts behind figures

- * Severely obese people are likely to die, on average, 11 years earlier.
- * 10,720 obesity-related hospital admissions in 2009 were a ten-fold increase in 10 years.
- * More than 6,000 weight-loss operations are performed on the NHS every year.
- * The most commons forms of surgery are gastric band (£5,000-£7,000) and gastric bypass (£8,000 to £14,000) operations.
- * More than half the adults living in London are overweight or obese.
- * The city has the UK's top child obesity rate - 11 per cent of four- and five-year-olds and 21 per cent of 10- or 11-year-olds in 2008/09.

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