

Pakistan



Health systems

Economic classification: **Lower Middle Income**

Health systems summary

Pakistan's health system is complex, with many subsystems and competing providers. Healthcare in the public sector is delivered by the federal and/or provincial government (dependent on area) while care in the private sector is delivered by actors ranging from hospitals to individually practising healthcare professionals, traditional healers and philanthropic organisations. The private sector is estimated to serve 70% of the Pakistani population, with Pakistan spending just 3.1% of its GDP on health. In 2015-2016, out of pocket expenditure was close to 60% of total health expenditure.

Pakistan is marked by severe urban-rural disparities. Despite an increase in the number of facilities in recent years, those in rural and remote areas have difficulty accessing services. This is exacerbated by a chronic shortage of healthcare workers.

Indicators

Where is the country's government in the journey towards defining 'Obesity as a disease'?	No
Where is the country's healthcare provider in the journey towards defining 'Obesity as a disease'?	No
Is there specialist training available dedicated to the training of health professionals to prevent, diagnose, treat and manage obesity?	No
Have any taxes or subsidies been put in place to protect/assist/inform the population around obesity?	No
Are there adequate numbers of trained health professionals in specialties relevant to obesity in urban areas?	No
Are there adequate numbers of trained health professionals in specialties relevant to obesity in rural areas?	No
Are there any obesity-specific recommendations or guidelines published for adults?	No
Are there any obesity-specific recommendations or guidelines published for children?	No
In practice, how is obesity treatment largely funded?	Out of pocket

Perceived barriers to treatment

Poor health literacy and/or behaviour	Lack of financial investment and funding for coverage	High cost of out of pocket payments	Food industry influence
Obesity not recognised as a disease	Fragmented and/or failing health system	Lack of training for healthcare professionals	Poor adherence or fear of treatment
Lack of evidence, monitoring and research			

Summary of stakeholder feedback

Obesity is not yet considered a disease in Pakistan by the government, the healthcare providers or the public. Aside from new nutritional guidelines published in late 2018, stakeholders reported a lack of action around prevention from the government. There were calls for more public awareness campaigns to inform the public around a healthy lifestyle and calls for better obesity-related research.

Stakeholders reported there to be a lack of obesity management and treatment guidelines in Pakistan, and relatedly no routinely used care pathways. It did appear, however, that there was agreement that individuals became eligible for pharmacological treatment at BMI > 30 kg/m². It is unclear whether treatment is covered by the government and insurance providers, but stakeholders reported that treatment was mostly financed out of pocket by individuals.

There is great regional disparity in access to care in Pakistan. Weight management programmes were reported to be concentrated in major cities and even then, stakeholders remarked that they are manned by insufficiently qualified staff. As a result, people living with obesity in rural areas were said to not enter the health system for care (compounded by the fact that those in rural areas are also less likely to consider obesity to be a disease and so think care is necessary).

There is no specialist obesity training available in Pakistan. Stakeholders reported that a lot of treatment is delivered by 'quacks', particularly in rural areas. This issue of quacks is not isolated to obesity treatment.

Based on interviews/survey returns from 4 stakeholders

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