

United Kingdom



Health systems

Economic classification: **High Income**

Health systems summary

The UK's National Health Service was established in 1948. Since 1997, responsibility for the financing and organisation of health services in the UK has been devolved to the four nations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales). Despite devolution, all nations have maintained a national health service that provides universal health coverage to most residents. The health systems are predominately financed by general taxation and are mostly free at the point of service. In 2016, government expenditure accounted for 79% of health expenditure with out-of-pocket expenditure accounting for 16%. Cost-sharing tends to be for specific services only, notably pharmaceuticals, dental care and social services (dependent on nation).

Indicators

Where is the country's government in the journey towards defining 'Obesity as a disease'?	Some progress
Where is the country's healthcare provider in the journey towards defining 'Obesity as a disease'?	Some progress
Is there specialist training available dedicated to the training of health professionals to prevent, diagnose, treat and manage obesity?	Some progress
Have any taxes or subsidies been put in place to protect/assist/inform the population around obesity?	Yes
Are there adequate numbers of trained health professionals in specialties relevant to obesity in urban areas?	Some progress
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?	Yes
Are there any obesity-specific recommendations or guidelines published for children?	Yes
In practice, how is obesity treatment largely funded?	Out of pocket

Perceived barriers to treatment

Lack of training for HCPs	Lack of financial investment and funding for coverage	Lack of treatment facilities	Stigma
Obesity not recognised as a disease	Lack of political will, interest and action	Failure at primary care level	Obesogenic environment
Failure to recognise all treatment options			

Summary of stakeholder feedback

It is broadly felt that neither the UK government nor its healthcare financing mechanisms currently recognise obesity as a disease. However, it was acknowledged that there is activity in this space, including lobbying by clinicians and the existence of an all parliamentary group on obesity. Not all stakeholders felt that obesity should be classified as a disease.

Stakeholders reported that people with obesity tended to enter the system via their general practitioner. There it seemed height, weight and BMI was generally not recorded (except in Scotland), with discussions about unhealthy BMI not taking place for a number of reasons. It was felt that people had to be persistent and proactive to receive treatment, disadvantaging those from lower socioeconomic groups, those with less education, men and the housebound. When there were referrals, uptake was noted to be low and this was felt to be where most fell out of the system. It was considered important for uptake that programmes were available in the evening and weekends.

Despite noting that the UK health system was mostly government funded, at least two stakeholders and one patient pointed out that obesity treatment was mostly funded out of pocket. Government funding into obesity was widely recognised to be inadequate but there was disagreement over whether this was improving. Some felt investment was improving, while another pointed to data that suggests that there is in fact dis-investment into weight management services at every tier of intervention.

The patients agreed with much of what was reported by the other stakeholders. They highlighted the importance of free at point of service management and treatment and noted that it was difficult to engage with services and programmes if they were during working hours. They also noted that they had to actively push to receive help, otherwise they would have fallen out of the system. Receiving treatment in the UK was said to be a 'postcode lottery'.

Based on interviews/survey returns from 11 stakeholders

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