

Health Care Spending for Obese U.S. Adults Rose More Than 80 Percent From 2001 to 2006

AHRQ News and Numbers

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Spending on health care for obese Americans age 18 and older increased 82 percent between 2001 and 2006, rising from \$167 billion to \$303 billion, according to the latest *News and Numbers* from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).

For the same years, total health care spending for adults who were overweight rose by 36 percent, from \$202 billion to \$275 billion, and total health care costs for normal-weight adults increased 25 percent, from \$208 billion to \$260 billion.

Body Mass Index (BMI) measures body fat in relation to height and weight. For an adult, a BMI of 30.0 or more indicates obesity; a BMI between 25.0 and 29.9 indicates overweight; and a BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 is in the normal weight range.

This analysis examined total health care spending, including doctor visits, hospital outpatient visits, emergency room visits, hospitalizations, home health care services, dental visits, other medical expenses, and prescription drugs in 2001 and 2006. It also found that:

- The proportion of overall medical care spending associated with adults who were obese grew from 28 percent to 35 percent. In contrast, the proportion of overall medical care spending associated with normal-weight adults decreased from 35 percent to 30 percent.
- When comparing by BMI category the proportion of adults who reported having one or more chronic conditions for the years 2001 and 2006, the obese population had the highest proportion in both years at 57 percent and 60 percent.
- When comparing 2001 and 2006, the number of obese Americans increased from 48 million people to 59 million people.

AHRQ, which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, improves the quality, safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of health care for all Americans. The data in this *AHRQ News and Numbers* summary are taken from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS), a detailed source of information on the health services used by Americans, the frequency with which they are used, the cost of those services, and how they are paid. For more information, go to [Trends in Health Care Expenditures by Body Mass Index \(BMI\) Category for Adults in the U.S. Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population, 2001 and 2006](#).

For more information, or to speak with an AHRQ data expert, please contact Bob Isquith at Bob.Isquith@ahrq.hhs.gov

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