Obesity in American Indian and Alaska Native Elders

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Background

- Obesity is an increasingly prominent threat to good health among all Americans, contributing to an estimated 400,000 deaths annually and costing about $122.9 billion, a figure that is comparable to the economic costs of cigarette smoking.1
- Groups that have a high prevalence of obesity include Asians/Pacific Islanders and American Indians/Alaska Natives.2

Research Questions

- What is the prevalence of obesity in AI/AN elders? By gender and age cohorts?
- Does the presence of obesity increase the likelihood of having co-morbid health conditions among AI/AN elders?

Methods

- Nationwide survey data collected in 2004-2005 by the University of North Dakota's National Resource Center on Native American Aging.

Obese AI/AN elders were more likely to have certain chronic health conditions, compared to their non-obese counterparts (Table 1). Obesity substantially increased the likelihood of having diabetes, asthma, hypertension, arthritis, and congestive heart failure.

Prevention

AI/AN elders can prevent obesity through concerted efforts to improve and maintain good nutritional and exercise regimes.

Elders who are obese should work with their health care providers to lose weight and increase physical activity, which has the following associated health benefits:6

- Decreased likelihood of stroke or diabetes
- Reduced blood pressure
- Improved cholesterol
- Reduced blood sugar
- Slowed progression of arthritis and reduction of joint damage/pain

References


Table 1. Comorbidities of Obese AI/AN Elders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>C.R. (C.1)</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td>1.86</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypertension</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthritis</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congestive heart failure</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>0.023</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Logistic regression result; Dependent variable obese (yes, no)

Centers available: gender, age, education, income.