



SPAIN

Does Spain recognize and treat obesity as a chronic disease?

- Obesity is recognized as a chronic disease by the Spanish Ministry of Health (Ministerio de Sanidad y Political Social).

How is obesity care structured in Spain?

- Spain has a publicly funded healthcare system composed of a hospital network that covers 99% of the population. Through this system, patients can access prevention and treatment services for any disease. Healthcare is delivered through 17 regional authorities.
- There is no national strategy for obesity in Spain. There is a national nutrition strategy that incorporates some obesity-related issues. Some regional authorities have created obesity plans but very few have been implemented and evaluated.

Which evidence-based obesity treatments are covered through the public healthcare system?

- Although obesity is listed as a chronic disease in the health system, most obesity treatments are not covered publicly. Treatment of complications of obesity such as diabetes and heart disease, however, are covered through the public health system.
- Overall, coverage of evidence-informed obesity treatments varies across regional health authorities, leaving many gaps. All obesity treatments (i.e. behavioural treatments, medications, nutrition therapy, physical therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy and bariatric surgery) are available in Spain. However, many of these treatments are either not covered or are insufficiently covered in the public health system. For example, anti-obesity medications are not covered. Bariatric surgery and surgical care (pre- and post-surgery) for patients with severe obesity is covered. However, only a small percentage of people with obesity who would have an indication for bariatric surgery can access it. There are also some lifestyle interventions covered in the public health system.
- Traditionally, obesity treatments were mostly delivered through tertiary care centres. These centres are multidisciplinary and very well integrated. Dietitians, for

example, are part of obesity interdisciplinary teams and are also integrated in most hospitals. When accessing dietetics services through these integrated teams, these services are covered by the public healthcare system.

- Primary care centres, on the other hand, focus more on diabetes and other chronic diseases. Primary care providers diagnose severe obesity by recording it in a patient's electronic medical record and referring patients to a tertiary care centre. With the arrival of new pharmacological therapeutics, obesity (mild and severe) is increasingly being diagnosed and treated in primary care settings.

What are some barriers to effective obesity prevention and treatment?

- Although some healthcare professionals and researchers investigate and advocate for more effective obesity strategies, there is a lack of political will to prioritize obesity prevention and management. Spain has national strategies for other diseases, but not for obesity.
- Many healthcare professionals in Spain continue to debate whether obesity is a chronic disease. Consequently, many healthcare professionals do not treat obesity as a chronic disease.
- While seven million people in Spain could potentially benefit from obesity treatment and would thus avoid developing obesity-related complications, the health system covers treatments for obesity related complications only. This creates inequities that should not be tolerated in an egalitarian society. From an economic perspective, only covering treatments for obesity complications is also not effective.
- There is a lack of training among healthcare professionals, including physicians. Obesity has not been traditionally included in medical school curricula, but this is improving. There is now some inclusion of obesity mechanisms, nutrition and treatment options in medical school curricula. Obesity education is needed for all healthcare professionals, not just primary care professionals but also specialists.

Are there any formal patient education and advocacy strategies?

- There are regional bariatric surgery support groups. These groups are growing, and could become national bodies in the future.