



# PORTUGAL

## Does Portugal recognize and treat obesity as a chronic disease?

- The government of Portugal and its minister of health have recognized obesity as a chronic disease since 2004. With this designation, all individuals affected by obesity have the right to receive obesity care.

## How is obesity care structured in Portugal?

- Portugal has a publicly funded healthcare system. However, private healthcare options are available.
- There are 19 national obesity treatment centres covered under the public healthcare system.
- People living with obesity can be referred to a national obesity treatment centre by their general practitioner.

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

- National obesity treatment centres offer most obesity treatments, including behavioural / psychosocial therapy, dietary interventions / nutrition therapy, physical therapy and bariatric surgery.
- Plastic surgery (post weight loss) is also covered through the public system.
- Obesity medications are not covered through the public healthcare system.
- The national obesity treatment centres are made up of interprofessional teams which include physicians, nurses, surgeons, dietitians, psychologists, physical therapists, exercise specialists and social workers.
- Obesity treatment follow-up after bariatric treatment lasts up to two years.

## What are the facilitators and barriers to effective obesity prevention and treatment?

- Portugal launched a National Platform Against Obesity

in 2008, under which prevention and management of obesity programs are implemented. This national platform was overseen by the Directorate General of Health.

- There have been significant public health efforts to prevent and reduce the prevalence of obesity in Portugal. For example, strategies to reduce unhealthy eating have been in place for over 10 years. The National Program for the Promotion of Healthy Eating was created in 2012 by the minister of health, and a new cross-departmental Integrated Strategy for the Promotion of Healthy Eating was launched in 2017.
- Portugal has developed policies to change the food environment (e.g. soft drink taxation, laws restricting marketing of foods to children, improved access to healthy foods in public places such as schools, hospitals and universities, and regulations to encourage the reformulation of food by food industry and retailers).
- The WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) reported a downward trend in overweight and obesity between 2008 and 2016. Childhood overweight decreased by 7.2%, while childhood obesity decreased by 3.6%.<sup>1</sup>
- There is a general lack of funding for the treatment of all chronic diseases in Portugal. This can lead to long wait times to access the national obesity treatment centres. In some hospitals, obesity treatment centres may not be prioritized.
- General practitioners may have insufficient knowledge and training about obesity, and may also hold negative beliefs and attitudes towards persons with obesity.<sup>2</sup> There is a need to educate physicians and health care professionals about evidence-based treatments, including medications.

## Are there any formal patient education and advocacy strategies?

- There is a national patient advocacy organisation called ADEXO (<http://www.adexo.pt/>).
- ADEXO advocates for patient-centered obesity care, including patient support programs.
- It was established in 2002 and implements programs designed following national consultations.
- ADEXO also implements education and awareness programs at the national and local level, including in schools and in the media.
- ADEXO is a member of the European Council for Persons Living with Obesity.

1. <http://www.euro.who.int/en/countries/portugal/news/news/2018/2/downward-trend-in-overweight-and-obesity-among-portuguese-school-children>  
2. Teixeira FV, Pais-Ribeiro JL, Maia A. A qualitative study of GPs' views towards obesity: are they fighting or giving up? Public Health. 2015 Mar;129(3):218-225. DOI: 10.1016/j.puhe.2015.01.004.