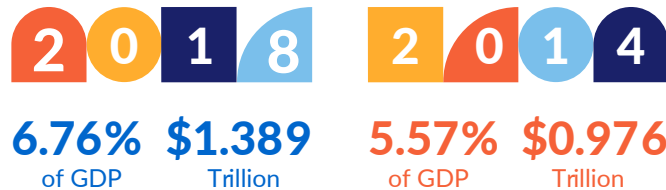


The cost of obesity in America is at an all-time high and continues to rise. We estimate the economic cost to be roughly 6.76 percent of gross domestic product (\$1.389 trillion) in 2018 compared to 5.57 percent (\$0.976 trillion) in 2014.

Economic and Social Cost of Obesity in America



Obesity is often mischaracterized as a lifestyle choice while it is a complex disease resulting from social, environmental, genetic, and behavioral factors. In *Weighing Down America: 2020 Update*, we leverage our ongoing work on communities in America to provide a multifaceted approach to this issue. Using county-level data, we find the social and behavioral factors correlated with the high prevalence of obesity. We then identify which combination of these factors should be tackled first in each community to help prevent obesity. Our approach supports prevention and treatment by identifying correlations without arriving at causal conclusions.

What Do We Find?

- **Noticeable growth in obesity prevalence among men.** Data from 2014 to 2018 show a noticeable growth in obesity prevalence within the male population, especially white males and males of all races aged 20–59.
- **Social and behavioral factors have the strongest association with obesity prevalence.** Unemployment, excessive drinking, smoking, post-secondary education, and single-parent households are associated with high prevalence of obesity across all communities.
- **Urban-rural factors have the second strongest association.** These factors include rurality, housing concerns, population density, metropolitan area, violent crime rate, and the number of fast-food establishments per 100,000 people.
- **The Black population factor has the third strongest association** with obesity prevalence across four communities.

Our Policy Recommendations

- **Cooperation among authorities is essential.** Solutions will require complementary actions from federal and local authorities, as well leaders in the public and private sectors, such as health care, business, education, child care, and the community.
- **Coordination requires a community-based approach.** Since obesity impacts segments of the American population differently, finding a solution starts with understanding the profiles of affected communities. Doing so allows local authorities to recognize peer locations facing similar challenges from whom they could learn or with whom they could cooperate. It also highlights common factors across communities that should be addressed at the federal level.
- **Data drive actionable policies.** While availability of data is not an issue, the data sets collected need to be properly combined, processed, and analyzed to inform policy in a meaningful and actionable manner.

