

Evidence Brief

Prevalence and Characteristics of Overweight and Obesity in Indigenous Australian Children: A Systematic Review (Profile of overweight and obesity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (age 0-18) in Australia)

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<http://www.tandonline.com/loi/bfsn20>

Background: Why this evidence is important?

Obesity is a leading risk factor contributing to the high level of chronic disease affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. To date, evidence-based profiling of obesity and overweight for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children has been poor. Decision makers working in government and the community require an evidence based understanding of the extent and nature of overweight and obesity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to better design and implement the most appropriate and effective obesity prevention and management strategies.

We performed a systematic review of studies measuring the prevalence and/or characteristics (patterns) of overweight and obesity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (age 0-18) in Australia. We assessed the quality of identified studies and examined how overweight/obesity prevalence patterns differ with respect to gender, age, remoteness and birth weight.

Findings: The profile of overweight and obesity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

We found 21 studies reporting prevalence of overweight and obesity in Aboriginal Children in Australia, which varied in quality. There was large variation in the overweight and obesity prevalence rates reported by studies; estimates ranged from 11%-54%. The two highest quality study suggests that at least one in four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are overweight or obese.

Differences in prevalence of overweight/obesity were found for specific characteristics. Of the six studies reporting on gender, four reported higher prevalence in girls. The eight studies reporting on age indicate that prevalence may increase with age with one high quality national study reporting overweight/obesity of 22.4% for children age 2-4 years, 27.5% for those aged 5-9, 38.5 % aged 10-14 and 36.3% aged 15-17. There is insufficient evidence to fully understand the patterns of overweight and obesity, particularly patterns by geographical location.

Recommendations for policy and research

- Government and community leaders should prioritise the design and adequate resourcing of evidence based initiatives (for example that support healthy eating and physical activity) to

promote healthy weight and wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

- Researchers, working in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders, need to further develop the evidence-based profile on overweight and obesity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This is critical to (i) raise awareness about the need to address this issue as a matter of priority; (ii) identify the most appropriate, effective and cost effective measures to address overweight and obesity; and (iii) to inform effective targeting of strategies.
- Conduct of this review highlighted the concern that the overweight/obesity definitions used in the studies identified are those that have been validated for use in all child populations, and may not be appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Therefore researchers measuring prevalence in future should explore the appropriateness of their definitions and measures, and adjust them if/where necessary.

For more information about this Evidence Brief and to access the systematic review informing it contact Judith Streak Gomersall: E-Mail address Judith.Gomersall@sahmri.com or Judith.Gomersall@adelaide.edu.au