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Community Health Sciences

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## NEW STUDY SAYS MORE THAN 25 PER CENT OF MANITOBANS ARE CONSIDERED OBESE

### *But impact on the healthcare system not as significant as expected*

Manitoba's healthcare system will not likely be overwhelmed by the demand for services related to obesity, says a new study from the University of Manitoba's Faculty of Medicine.

In the first study of this scale to connect people's weight with their use of health services, researchers from the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy found the impact on the healthcare system from obese and overweight people may not be as significant as expected.

The study used people's weight and height from nationally-administered health surveys from 1989 to 2008 to get their Body Mass Index (BMI). People with a BMI of 25 to 29.9 are in the overweight group and those with a BMI of 30 or greater are in the obese group.

While those in the obese group used more health services than average, the difference was quite small, and only came into play at the high end of the BMI scale (35 and higher).

"These are the most unique findings from this report, and are important because they imply that the healthcare system will not be swamped by demands driven by obesity," says Dr. Randy Fransoo, lead researcher in the study. "One of the biggest surprises we found was that people in the overweight group did not have a huge increase in health problems or premature death."

Obesity doesn't kill people directly but is related to the development of a number of poor health outcomes, including high blood pressure and diabetes. These are important because they cause serious problems themselves, and they're related to heart disease and stroke, which are leading causes of death.

Obesity rates increased in Manitoba over the period of the study. Overall, more

than a quarter of people in the province are now considered obese. Rates for males continue to increase, whereas females appear to have leveled off by around the year 2000. The proportion of males in the obese group increased from 18.4 per cent to 28.3 per cent. The proportion of females in the obese group increased from 16.6 per cent to 25.9 per cent.

In both sexes, the largest increases in obesity were among young adults. “This is disturbing because it means young people will be exposed to obesity-related risks from a younger age,” says Fransoo.

This study confirms what’s been proven in the past – geography, marital status and employment can influence weight. Age, sex, education, smoking, and physical activity level can influence weight as well.

Researchers found something interesting about inactivity as well. Even for those who exercised during their leisure time, they were less likely to be obese if they also spent less time sitting throughout the entire week.

”Being sedentary for more than 30 hours a week was associated with a greater risk of obesity, even for people who were otherwise active,” notes Fransoo.

*MCHP is a research unit in the Department of Community Health Sciences in the Faculty of Medicine, at the University of Manitoba. Research scientists and their collaborators at MCHP study health services, population and public health, and the social determinants of health using data from the entire population of Manitoba. Most of the research answers questions of interest to policy makers based on a formal association with Manitoba Health and input from other government departments.*



**Dr. Randy Fransoo is available for interviews. For more information, please contact Jack Rach, communications officer, Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, Community Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, at: 204-789-3669.**

**The summary and full report will be available for download on Friday, October 21, 2011, from: <http://mchp-appserv.cpe.umanitoba.ca/deliverablesList.html>**