

## **The Obesity Epidemic in Washington, D.C.**

Overweight and obesity have reached epidemic proportions in the U.S. – 66% of Americans are overweight or obese, there are now more obese than overweight individuals, and one in five children and adolescents are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight.

- D.C. has the largest prevalence of overweight children in U.S. – 23%
- D.C. has the highest rate of racial disparities in the nation with regards to obesity: 8% of white
- D.C. residents are obese, while 31% of African-Americans are obese; Ward 8 has an obesity rate of 36% while Ward 3's rate is 12.4%; obesity rates are also very high in Wards 4, 5, 6 and 7.
- Women in D.C are tied with four other states – Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas – for the highest obesity rates (37%) in the nation.

### **High Risk Populations**

African Americans are disproportionately impacted with regards to obesity. Obesity is also significantly higher in Latino communities as compared to white populations. Obesity tends to be more prevalent in populations of lower socioeconomic status. Women of child-bearing age are at high risk due to weight retention following pregnancy. These are all populations with substantial representation in D.C:

- Approximately 60% of D.C. residents are Black and 10% are Hispanic
- 41% of residents are considered to be “low-income”
- More than 25% of residents are women of child-bearing age and teen pregnancy rates in D.C. are significantly higher (63 per 1000) than the U.S. average (41 per 1000 births)

### **Health, Economic, and Psychosocial Implications**

Excess weight is associated with a host of chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, asthma/other respiratory ailments, heart disease, stroke, and some cancers. Due to these associations, overweight and obesity are related to significant increases in health care costs.

Obesity is also associated with lower perception of cognitive ability, poor school performance, higher unemployment rates, social isolation, depression and increased teasing.

- In D.C., 5 of the top 10 causes of death are directly related to diet, physical activity and weight status – heart disease, cancer, hypertension, diabetes and stroke.

### **Causes of Obesity**

Scientists suggest that our obesity epidemic results from an environment that promotes over-eating (i.e., large portions of high energy-dense food, consumption of food-away-from-home, lack of access to healthy foods, marketing junk food to children) while discouraging physical activity (increased use of cars, lack of access to safe recreation sites, excess screen-time). Stress is considered by many health experts to be the third-leg of the obesity triangle.

- Compared to NW, areas of NE, SE and SW have severely limited access to preventive medical care, healthy foods and safe recreational facilities.

**This fact sheet was provided by the DC Department of Health**