

**Media Contacts:**

Albert Lang (202) 223-9870 x 21 or [alang@tfah.org](mailto:alang@tfah.org)

Chris Clayton (609) 627-5937 or [media@rwjf.org](mailto:media@rwjf.org)

## New Report: Puerto Rico's Adult Obesity Rate is 27.9 Percent

**Washington, D.C., September 4, 2014** – Puerto Rico now has an adult obesity rate of 27.9 percent, according to [\*The State of Obesity: Better Policies for a Healthier America\*](#), a report from the Trust for America's Health (TFAH) and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF).

The annual report found that rates of obesity are above 35 percent for the first time ever in two states (Mississippi and West Virginia), are at or exceed 30 percent in 20 states and are not below 21 percent in any.

National findings reveal that significant geographic, income, racial and ethnic disparities persist, with obesity rates highest in the South and among Blacks, Latinos and lower-income, less-educated Americans. The report also found that more than one in ten children become obese as early as ages 2 to 5.

Other key findings from [\*The State of Obesity\*](#) include:

**After decades of rising obesity rates among adults, the rate of increase is beginning to slow, but rates remain far too high and disparities persist.**

- In 2005, the obesity rate increased in every state but one; this past year, only six states experienced an increase. In last year's report, only one state, Arkansas, experienced an increase in its adult obesity rate.
- Obesity rates remain higher among Black and Latino communities than among Whites:
  - Adult obesity rates for Blacks are at or above 40 percent in 11 states, 35 percent in 29 states and 30 percent in 41 states.
  - Rates of adult obesity among Latinos exceeded 35 percent in five states and 30 percent in 23 states.
  - Among Whites, adult obesity rates topped 30 percent in 10 states.
- Nine out of the 10 states with the highest obesity rates are in the South.
- Baby Boomers (45-to 64-year-olds)\* have the highest obesity rates of any age group - and 39.9 percent of Baby Boomers in Mississippi are obese. Nationally, rates topped 35 percent in 17 states and 30 percent in 40 states.
- More than 33 percent of adults 18 and older who earn less than \$15,000 per year are obese, compared with 25.4 percent who earn at least \$50,000 per year.
- More than 6 percent of adults are *severely*\*\* obese; the number of severely obese adults has quadrupled in the past 30 years.

"Obesity in America is at a critical juncture. Obesity rates are unacceptably high, and the disparities in rates are profoundly troubling," said Jeffrey Levi, PhD, executive director of TFAH. "We need to intensify prevention efforts starting in early childhood and do a better job of implementing effective policies and programs in all communities - so every American has the greatest opportunity to have a healthy weight and live a healthy life."

**The national childhood obesity rate has leveled off, and rates have declined in some places and among some groups, but disparities persist and severe obesity may be on the rise.**

- As of 2011-2012:
  - Nearly one out of three children and teens ages 2 to 19 is overweight or obese, and national obesity rates among this age group have remained stable for 10 years.
  - More than 1 in 10 children become obese between the ages of 2 to 5; and 5 percent of 6- to 11-year-olds are *severely* obese.
  - Racial and ethnic disparities emerge in childhood (ages 2-19): The obesity rates are 22.4 percent among Hispanics, 20.2 percent among Blacks and 14.1 percent among Whites.
- Between 2008 and 2011, 18 states and one the U.S. Virgin Islands experienced a decline in obesity rates among preschoolers from low-income families.

"While adult rates are stabilizing in many states, these data suggest that our overall progress in reversing America's obesity epidemic is uneven and fragile," said Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, MD, RWJF president and CEO. "A growing number of cities and states have reported decreases in obesity among children, showing that when we make comprehensive changes to policies and community environments, we can build a Culture of Health that makes healthy choices the easy and obvious choices for kids and adults alike. Going forward, we must spread what works to prevent obesity to every state and region, with special focus on those communities where rates remain the highest."

*The State of Obesity* reviews existing policies and issues high-priority recommendations for making affordable healthy foods and safe places for physical activity available to all Americans, such as focusing on healthy food financing, improving nutrition and activity in schools and child care settings, limiting the marketing of unhealthy foods to kids, and improving the built environment to support increased physical activity. In addition, for this year's report, TFAH and RWJF partnered with the NAACP, [Salud America! The RWJF Research Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children](#), and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research to identify more effective strategies for implementing obesity-prevention policies in Black and Latino communities.

Recommendations, [which were based on a series of in-depth interviews with public health experts in Black and Latino communities around the country](#), included:

- Expanding access to affordable healthy foods and opportunities for physical activity by increasing resources for programs, connecting obesity-prevention initiatives with other ongoing community programs, and other approaches;
- Providing education and addressing cultural differences to both improve people's knowledge about nutrition and physical activity and make initiatives more relevant to their daily lives; and
- Making sustainability, community input, involvement and shared leadership top priorities of obesity-prevention initiatives from the outset.

*The State of Obesity* (formerly known as the *F as in Fat* report series) is the 11<sup>th</sup> annual report produced by TFAH and RWJF, with support by a grant from RWJF. The full report, with state rankings in all categories and new interactive maps, is available at <http://stateofobesity.org>. Follow the conversation at #StateofObesity.

**\* (45-64 Year Olds, includes most Baby Boomers, who range from 49-67 year olds)**

*Adult obesity = Body Mass Index of 30 or more; \*\*Severe obesity in adults = BMI of 40 or more.*

*Childhood obesity = BMI at or above the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for children of same age/sex; Severe obesity in children = BMI greater than 120 percent of 95<sup>th</sup> percentile for children of same age/sex.*

## **2013 STATE-BY-STATE ADULT OBESITY RATES**

Based on an analysis of new state-by-state data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey, adult obesity rates by state from highest to lowest were:

*Note: 1 = Highest rate of adult obesity, 51 = lowest rate of adult obesity.*

1. (tie) Mississippi and West Virginia (35.1%); 3. Arkansas (34.6%); 4. Tennessee (33.7%); 5. Kentucky (33.2%); 6. Louisiana (33.1%); 7. Oklahoma (32.5%); 8. Alabama (32.4%); 9. Indiana (31.8%); 10. South Carolina (31.7%); 11. Michigan (31.5%); 12. Iowa (31.3%); 13. Delaware (31.1%); 14. North Dakota (31%); 15. Texas (30.9%); 16. (tie) Missouri and Ohio (30.4%); 18. Georgia (30.3%); 19. (tie) Kansas and Pennsylvania (30%); 21. South Dakota (29.9%); 22. Wisconsin (29.8%); 23. (tie) Idaho and Nebraska (29.6%); 25. (tie) Illinois and North Carolina (29.4%); 27. Maine (28.9%); 28. Alaska (28.4%); 29. Maryland (28.3%); 30. Wyoming (27.8%); 31. Rhode Island (27.3%); 32. (tie) Virginia and Washington (27.2%); 34. Arizona (26.8%); 35. New Hampshire (26.7%); 36. Oregon (26.5%); 37. (tie) Florida and New Mexico (26.4%); 39. New Jersey (26.3%); 40. Nevada (26.2%); 41. Minnesota (25.5%); 42. New York (25.4%); 43. Connecticut (25.0%); 44. Vermont (24.7%); 45. Montana (24.6%); 46. (tie) California and Utah (24.1%); 48. Massachusetts (23.6%); 49. Washington, D.C. (22.9%) 50. Hawaii (21.8%); 51. Colorado (21.3%).

*Trust for America's Health is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority. For more information, visit [www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org).*

*For more than 40 years the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has worked to improve the health and health care of all Americans. We are striving to build a national Culture of Health that will enable all Americans to live longer, healthier lives now and for generations to come. For more information, visit [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org). Follow the Foundation on Twitter at [www.rwjf.org/twitter](http://www.rwjf.org/twitter) or on Facebook at [www.rwjf.org/facebook](http://www.rwjf.org/facebook).*

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