



Obesity Cited Number-One Kids' Health Issue

Washington, DC; December 13, 2006 - Obesity or being overweight is seen as the most important health issue for U.S. children, according to a new poll commissioned by Research!America and The Endocrine Society. More than a quarter of Americans (27 percent) named obesity as the top health issue for kids, followed by lack of health care/insurance (16 percent) and nutrition/unhealthy diet (9 percent).

Americans are divided on whether addressing obesity is an individual or societal issue. According to the poll, 52 percent think obesity is a public health issue that society should help solve; 46 percent say it is a private issue that people should deal with on their own. When asked who should be responsible in addressing obesity, Americans say it should be an individual and community effort. They say responsibility to help address obesity lies to some or a great extent with parents (98 percent agree), individuals (96 percent), schools (87 percent), health care providers (84 percent), the food industry (81 percent) and government (67 percent).

More than half (57 percent) of Americans say most adults in the United States are overweight or obese, and more than a third (35 percent) say most children are. Perceptions are close to reality: 66 percent of American adults (ages 20-74) are overweight or obese, although only about 17 percent of children (ages 2-19) are, according to the National Center for Health Statistics at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Clearly, Americans recognize the obesity epidemic facing this country and our children," said Dr. Leonard Wartofsky, president of The Endocrine Society. "However, the poll shows that the public thinks we should address obesity as a public health issue to bolster the actions of individuals and families. Health care professionals and researchers need to help convey the importance of a stronger public health response to this epidemic."

When asked about the most important health issue for all ages, 24 percent cited health insurance/health care costs, followed by cancer (15 percent), access to health care (11 percent) and obesity/nutrition (9 percent). Other key findings in the poll include:

- Most Americans (92 percent) say their school required participation in physical education (PE) when they were children;

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- 68 percent think PE is now required daily in elementary school, when actually fewer than one-fourth of the nation's elementary schools provide daily physical education (U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics);
- 81 percent say it is important for the U.S. government to invest in obesity research, and 84 percent say it is important to invest in public health and prevention programs to help reduce obesity among Americans; and
- 67 percent would be willing to pay \$1 per week more in taxes if they were certain the money would fund research to improve health.

"Research is the answer to many of the health issues we face, including obesity," said Mary Woolley, Research!America president. "Americans understand that and clearly want adequate funding for research that can improve their health and the health of their families."

What Should Americans Know About Obesity Research

Research is attempting to determine the root causes of obesity and define the most effective measures to prevent and combat it. Pivotal research is being conducted to:

- Define the hormonal control of fat, carbohydrate and protein metabolism;
- Identify the hormones involved in appetite regulation;
- Examine and assess the genetics of obesity; and
- Unravel the control of lipids.

According to The Endocrine Society, most obesity is caused by an energy imbalance—consuming more energy than the body expends. However, there are many genetic, hormonal, and environmental factors that can affect this imbalance. In general, a patient should see an endocrinologist if:

- Behavior modifications, such as exercise and diet, are not effective for weight loss;
- The patient has an endocrine disorder, such as diabetes, that can be aggravated by obesity; or
- The patient has an underlying endocrine condition that increases their risk for obesity, such as Cushing's syndrome or hypothyroidism.

Specialists in metabolism, endocrinologists are actively engaged in the research, management, and treatment of obesity and related diseases. Endocrinologists also study how hormones regulate appetite, metabolism, and energy balance. They also evaluate obese patients to determine if there is a primary reason for obesity; treat the medical

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conditions associated with obesity, including insulin resistance, reproductive difficulties, metabolic syndrome and genetic problems; and educate their patients and the public about obesity and its consequences.

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*Founded in 1916, **The Endocrine Society** is the world's oldest, largest, and most active organization devoted to research on hormones and the clinical practice of endocrinology. Today, The Endocrine Society's membership consists of more than 13,000 scientists, physicians, educators, nurses and students in more than 80 countries. Together, these members represent all basic, applied and clinical interests in endocrinology. For more information, see www.endo-society.org and www.obesityinamerica.org.*

***Research!America** is the nation's largest public education and advocacy alliance working to make research to improve health a higher national priority. Research!America has been gauging Americans' attitudes toward medical and health research for more than a decade. For more information, see www.researchamerica.org. Charlton Research Company conducted the telephone survey in September 2006 among 800 adults nationwide for Research!America. The sample was proportionate to the country's demographics, including age, geography, gender and ethnicity. The survey has a sampling error of ± 3.5 percentage points.*