Managing Obesity in Youth and Young Adults

SAMHSA’s Program to Achieve Wellness

Individuals who are obese and have a serious mental illness face high levels of stigma, prejudice and discrimination, leading to several barriers in medical care, employment, housing, and relationships.¹

People with serious mental illness are more likely to be obese.²

In 2015, just 51.6% of high school students aged 14-18 attended physical education classes at least one day a week. That year, 29.9% of high school students were overweight or obese.³

**In The Transition to Adulthood (Ages 18-25)**⁴

At age 18-20, 33.9% of females were overweight or obese. At 20-25, 39.1% of females were overweight or obese – a 5.2% increase.

At age 18-20, 38% of males were overweight or obese. At 20-25, 48.5% of males were overweight or obese – a 10.5% increase.

**Take Action**

*(for medical, mental health and substance use disorder providers):*

- Incorporate overall health and wellness as part of the treatment plan, collaborating with primary care providers as needed⁵
- Deliver cognitive-behavioral and family-based treatments to address problematic weight-related attitudes and behaviors⁶
- Address the role of negative emotions found in people struggling with weight and obesity, such as depressive symptoms⁷
- Offer a comprehensive set of wellness services to patients that includes a combination of screening and risk assessment, nutritional education and weight management to support healthy habits⁸
- Promote and encourage patients to engage in healthy lifestyle activities (such as exercise and healthy eating) that are backed with peer support⁹
- Find innovative ways to engage caregivers and family members in a conversation about healthy lifestyle habits⁸
- Support workforce training for providers to develop the skills and knowledge needed to work with youth and young adults and their families


