



# MIND SET

Moving In New Directions

Obesity Policy Analysis and Advocacy Decision Tool

## DON'T MISS OPPORTUNITIES TO PREVENT CHILDHOOD OBESITY: social, policy and environmental interventions to thwart obesity

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The 2016 prevalence data, referring to overweight and obesity, among Italian adults stand at 58.6% (65.3 males and 51.5 women), in line with the European average (58.7) and those relating to obesity alone are even more comforting: 19.9% (20.1 males and 19.5 females) against the European average of 23.6% (21.8 males and 24.5 females). The scenarios change by analyzing the prevalence data among school-age children (5-9 years). In the ranking of the worst WHO European regions, Italy is in first place: the total average of overweight and obese children is expected to be 42% (44.7 males and 39.2 females), far from that of the European region equal to 29.5 (32.1 males and 26.6 females).

We also share "the black jersey" together with Greece for obese children: 17.8% (20.5 males and 14.9 females), against a European average of 11.6 (14 males and 9.1 females). The rankings change slightly if we look at the prevalence data by age (7-9 years) detected by the European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (Cosi): the percentages of overweight and obesity in Italy stand at 41.9% among children, with worst-case scenarios in Cyprus, Greece and Spain, and 38.5 among girls (Cyprus and Spain are worse). On the other hand, 21% of Italian boys and 14% of girls are obese.

As well known, obesity is among the main determinants of death and disability and this condition is the cause of 13 different types of cancer, thus there is the urgency to find strategy to be treated. Indeed, if the history of obesity begins as children we can expect even more devastating consequences than those who become obese as an adult. Traditionally, pharmacological, nutritional and lifestyle interventions to tackle obesity were focused on individual health determinants and were not able to stop the spread of this "pandemic".

Thus, evidence now supports to need to consider the role and influence of social, physical and commercial environments in which children live as additional intervention that should be adopted to at least avoid the growing prevalence of this diseases. Social, policy and environmental interventions have been identified as the farthest-reaching influences in thwarting obesity.

The targets of these interventions should be :

1. to increase awareness of and actions to change attitudes and norms to promote healthy energy balance;
2. to make healthy options for physical activity and nutrition readily available and the default choices and
3. to decrease barriers to make healthy choices.

Government action is of paramount importance to help thwart obesogenic environments: for instance, by determining the types of food available and affordable; by restricting the advertising of high fat, salt and sugary foods products to children; by promoting more green urban areas to perform physical activity; and by providing the information to help parents make healthy choices for themselves and their children. National policies on school-based health education can also take part to action on obesity prevention. The most successful interventions should usually tailored to local contexts, taking account of existing social, environmental and cultural factors. Engaging with and empowering local stakeholders and children/families within communities can help ensure sustainable, inclusive and equitable lifestyle and behavior change.

Building on existing national/regional frameworks and policies and influencing social rules can help support the sustainability of community programmes.

For this purpose, the OPERA (Obesity, Programmes of nutrition, Education, Research and Assessment of the best treatment) PREVENTION PROJECT was a campaign of prevention of obesity that was held in Naples on October 11th–13th 2019<sup>(1)</sup>.

The OPERA PREVENTION PROJECT was part of the great event Campus 3S (Health, Sport and Solidarity) which has moved since 2010 from Naples to the largest Italian squares ([www.campussalute.it](http://www.campussalute.it) for details).

The OPERA PREVENTION PROJECT was also a strategic project of The UNESCO Chair on “Health Education and Sustainable Development” (<https://www.unescochairnapoli.it/> for details) chaired by Professor Annamaria Colao.

This project offered an innovative path through which men and women with obesity became aware of the disease and how to treat it.

The project was based on the organization of a medical, athletic, tasting and psychological path with the following objectives:

1. Providing a free medical examination to subjects with obesity;
2. providing athletic advices to perform physical activity;
3. performing a show-cooking in order to teach subjects with obesity to cook healthy food;
4. providing a gustatory and olfactory sensitivity assessment;
5. providing a psychological examination through questionnaires to evaluate obstacles to start a weight loss programme and to psychologically support subjects with obesity on a virtual journey made through a reshaping software programme.

Although this campaign of prevention of obesity was carried out to prevent obesity in adults, it could represent a suitable health promotion intervention that could be reproduced for children with obesity in all the countries having prevalence of obesity and overweight.

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/obesity/publications/2022/who-european-regional-obesity-report-2022#:~:text=This%20report%20on%20obesity%20in%20the%20WHO%20European,key%20risk%20factors%20for%20many%20noncommunicable%20diseases%20%28NCDs%29.?msclkid=f0675ac6cf7e11ec8bd2034571f77a1e>

## OPEN ITALY

Il network OPEN (Obesity Policy Engagement Network) ITALY è una iniziativa di advocacy istituzionale sull'obesità che è collegato ad un'iniziativa globale che ha l'obiettivo, attraverso il confronto reciproco e lo scambio di best practice, di sostenere il percorso nazionale di ogni Nazione aderente per il raggiungimento degli obiettivi di policy per la prevenzione e la cura dell'obesità.

Attraverso la rete nazionale e globale ai membri è data l'opportunità di discutere dei progressi e dei risultati ottenuti nel proprio Paese, ottenere informazioni e suggerimenti da altri Paesi ed esperti, nonché strumenti tangibili per sviluppare ulteriormente la propria strategia nazionale sull'obesità.

OPEN Italy si è insediato a Roma il 7 ottobre 2019 ed è costituito da esperti che rappresentano società scientifiche, associazioni pazienti e di cittadinanza, rappresentanti politico-istituzionali.

Obiettivo di OPEN ITALY è quello di ottenere il riconoscimento politico, clinico e pubblico dell'obesità come malattia per garantire una responsabilità condivisa, e non solo sul singolo individuo;

- Rivedere e ottimizzare l'allocazione delle risorse sanitarie per garantire finanziamenti per l'assistenza e la cura della persona con obesità;
- Integrare l'obesità nel percorso di formazione e nei curricula di apprendimento per le professioni legate all'obesità al fine di adottare cure più efficaci e informate;
- Istituire centri di obesità multidisciplinari e garantire l'accesso alle cure transdisciplinari per le persone con obesità.

**OPEN MIND SET** è un tool di discussione e approfondimento su temi di politica sanitaria, sociali, economici e clinici per favorire il dibattito istituzionale e l'advocacy sull'obesità.

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