



# media release

Corner Hawkesbury Road & Hainsworth Street, Westmead NSW 2145

the  
children's  
hospital at Westmead



The Sydney children's  
Hospitals Network

## SEVERE OBESITY AFFECTING MORE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN THAN FIRST THOUGHT, NEW RESEARCH FINDS

\*\*\*EMBARGOED UNTIL 0400hrs AEST\*\*\*

Friday 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2016

The findings, published today in *Trends in the Prevalence of Morbid and Severe Obesity in Australian Children Aged 7-15 Years (1985-2012)*, highlight a growing concern from paediatric obesity experts about the extent of the issue.

“The numbers on how many Australian children have severe obesity have never been crunched until now and our findings suggest we have underestimated the issue.

“We estimate that more than 30,000 Australian children may be affected,” says Associate Professor Sarah Garnett, Dietitian and Senior Research Fellow based in the Institute of Endocrinology at The Children’s Hospital at Westmead.

Data used for the study was obtained from four National Surveys between 1985 and 2012 and showed a significant increase in the prevalence of severe obesity in children aged between 7-15 years.

“The greatest increase was between 1995 and 2007, where the proportion of obese children with severe obesity jumped by 50 per cent from 20 per cent in 1995 to 30 per cent in 2007.”

Similar to previous studies suggesting the rate of obesity in children and adolescents may be slowing in several countries, including Australia and the US, the percentage of severely obese children also remained unchanged over the last five years.

However, researchers are concerned that the number of children refusing to have their height and weight measured is increasing and their results may underestimate the extent of the problem.

“In contrast to overweight and obese children, children with severe obesity require specialist care; failure to treat these children will have huge implications for the individual and our health care system in the years to come.

“Currently there are not enough paediatric obesity services to look after these children. The impact in the future will be enormous if we don’t put more resources into treatment for children with severe obesity.

“Better strategies for prevention of obesity are required, but we also need improved training and facilities for obesity management,” Associate Professor Garnett said.

The Children’s Hospital at Westmead facilitates the only dedicated multidisciplinary Weight Management Service for children and adolescents in New South Wales.

Associate Professor Sarah Garnett is available for interview.

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