

foods, which may increase the risk of obesity. In addition, geographic remoteness makes access to affordable, fresh, healthy food more difficult.

The overall community environment also influences childhood obesity rates. Community self-government and determination are recognized to be important social determinants of health for Aboriginal peoples, and thus may lead to lower rates of obesity.

Built Environment

A safe and healthy built environment allows children to access healthy foods and activities. This includes safe playgrounds and play areas, presence of recreation facilities, safe walking paths, availability of healthy foods and fresh produce, reduced access to fast food restaurants and health clinics with culturally competent care providers.



Society

Beyond the family and community, society-level factors also influence obesity rates. Local, provincial, and federal policies relating to food, recreation, and environmental protection influence an individual, family and/or community's ability to make healthy choices. Media, through food advertising and portrayals of beauty and weight, influences norms and values regarding eating, activity, body image, etc., which in turn influences rates of obesity.

Historical Factors

Colonization by Europeans, dispossession of traditional lands, and assimilation policies are all recognized social determinants of health for Aboriginal peoples. These policies reduce access to culturally competent care, reduce food security, education and employment, and reduce access to healthy food and structural environments in Aboriginal communities. They increase poverty and the chance of a child growing up in a single parent family, etc. These historical factors are recognized to be an important overarching reason that Aboriginal children are more likely to grow up in a community with higher rates of obesity and its associated diseases.

Impact of obesity on Aboriginal children and communities

According to the 2010 Heart and Stroke Foundation's Annual Report on Canadians' Health, Aboriginal peoples are experiencing a "full-blown cardiovascular crisis". Obese children are more likely to become obese adults and have an increased chance of developing many serious health issues including heart disease, breathing problems, high blood pressure, various types of cancer (as adults), arthritis and other joint problems, bone problems, gall bladder disease, high cholesterol, certain reproductive disorders, problems with self-esteem, depression, social isolation and youth-onset type 2 diabetes.



