

Obesity prevention landscape in South Africa: Mapping of the major stakeholders and initiatives

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BACKGROUND

South Africa is facing an emerging obesity epidemic, which is driven by urbanization, rising food prices and increased access to processed food. This study aimed to map the main stakeholders and initiatives related to obesity prevention in South Africa.

METHOD

A landscape review and a series of interviews with key informants was conducted to identify key data sources; academic institutions and research groups; government and non-governmental organizations (incl. professional organizations, advocacy and service oriented groups); major donors; training programs; existing policies and private sector initiatives related to obesity prevention and nutrition in South Africa.

RESULTS

The review concluded the following: (i) there is a dearth of research on food environments and consumption (i.e. understanding why people consume the types of food they eat) and the role of the trade and food industry on access and availability; (ii) lack of health awareness and choice among the population (e.g. cultural connotations related to obesity; access to healthy food); (iii) the need for a platform for advocacy and coalition building amongst stakeholders; and (iv) the need for intersectoral engagement at government level.

CONCLUSION

There is a need for more research focusing on the food environment and consumption patterns, a national monitoring system for nutrition data, increased health awareness, food choices and a multi-stakeholder engagement at government level to help curb the obesity epidemic in South Africa.