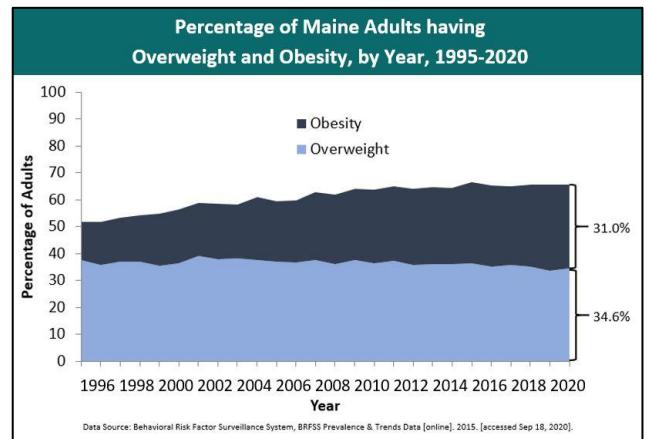


**OBESITY IS A CHRONIC DISEASE**

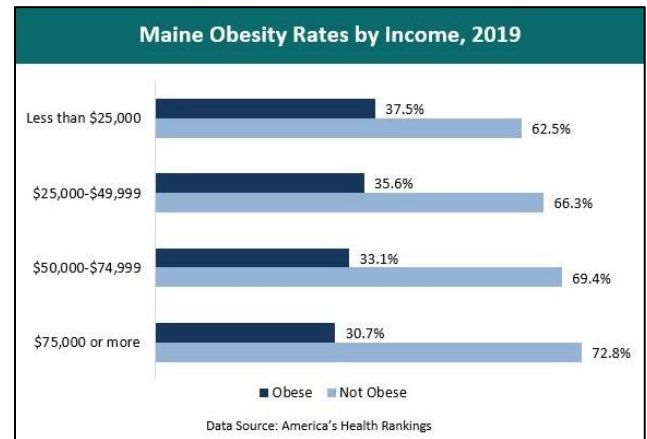
Obesity is a condition in which a person has an unhealthy amount and/or distribution of body fat. In 2013, the American Medical Association officially recognized obesity as a chronic disease.<sup>1</sup> Obesity is a chronic disease that impacts other chronic diseases including hypertension, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoarthritis, and cancer. As such, practitioners use “People First Language”<sup>2</sup> to address their patients who have a disease (e.g., as “person with a disease”) rather than labeling individuals by their condition. Using “People First Language” allows health professionals to treat patients that have obesity with the same respect and dignity as patients with other diseases such as diabetes and cancer.

**OBESITY IN MAINE**

The most current data (2020) show 65.6% of Maine adults having overweight and obesity, with overweight at 34.6% and obesity at 31.0%.<sup>3</sup> Comparatively, for the same year, the U.S. overweight and obesity rate is similar at 67.1%, with overweight at 35.2% and obesity at 31.9%.<sup>3</sup> Obesity rates have been rising in Maine and across the country for a number of years, and although overweight rates may be declining slightly, many are transitioning from overweight to obesity. With an increase in obesity comes an increased risk for many chronic diseases, including cancer.



Unfortunately, obesity affects some groups more than others. In Maine, data suggest that those with lower incomes tend to be at higher risk for having obesity.<sup>4</sup> Data from America’s Health Rankings (2019) indicate that in Maine, non-Hispanic Black adults had the highest age-adjusted prevalence of obesity (34.8%), followed by non-Hispanic White adults (31.1%) with lower rates reported in Hispanic adults (28.2%).<sup>5</sup>\* Other factors that affect obesity include access to adequate nutritious food options, food insecurity, rurality, and healthcare or treatment options.



\*Estimates for other race and ethnicity categories are not available due to small survey sample sizes.

**CANCER IN MAINE**

Cancer is the leading cause of death in Maine and has been since 2002.<sup>6</sup> For the past 20 years, cancer death rates in Maine have been significantly higher than the U.S. rate. In 2018, cancer accounted for over 20% of all deaths in the state. Maine also has one of the highest rates of new cancer cases in the nation at 465.8 per 100,000 which is significantly higher than the U.S. rate of 436.0 per 100,000. Each year, in Maine, more than 9,000 adults are newly diagnosed with cancer and more than 3,000 die from the disease. Many cancers are impacted and can be avoided by modifying risk factors such as limiting alcohol use, eating healthy, staying active, and not using tobacco.

<sup>1</sup> <https://policysearch.ama-assn.org/policyfinder/detail/obesity?uri=%2FAMADoc%2FHOD.xml-0-3858.xml>

<sup>2</sup> <https://odr.dc.gov/page/people-first-language>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/>

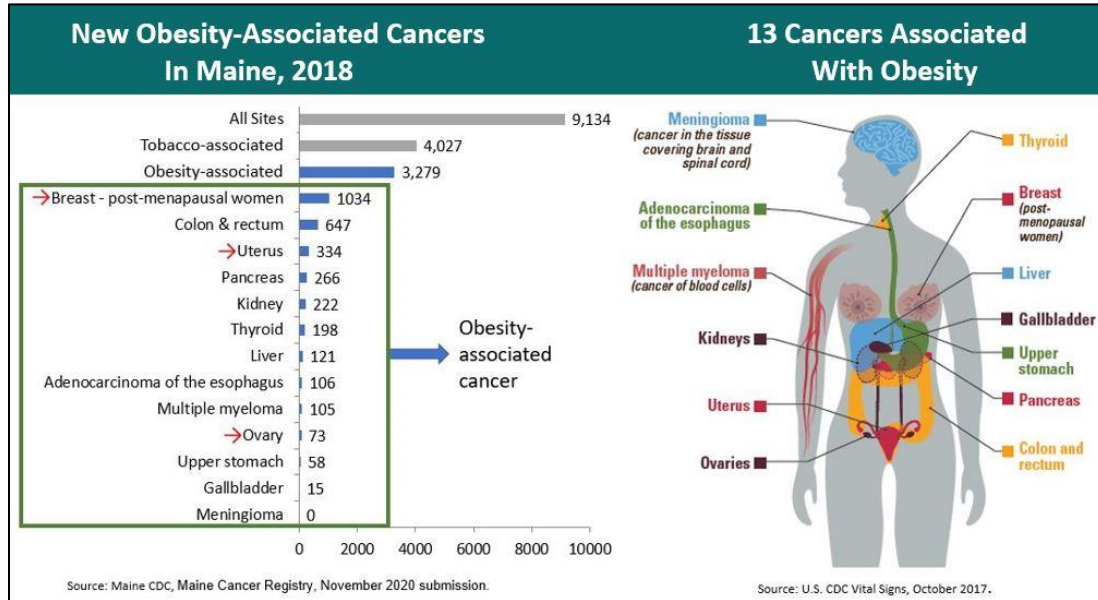
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/prevalence-maps.html#overall>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/data-research/data/documents/pdf/Mortality\\_2018\\_final%20CORRECTED.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/data-research/data/documents/pdf/Mortality_2018_final%20CORRECTED.pdf)

**OBESITY-ASSOCIATED CANCER IN MAINE**

Due to increasing rates of obesity in Maine, the number of people diagnosed with obesity-associated cancers is likely to rise. Currently, there are 13 cancers associated with overweight and obesity.<sup>7</sup> These 13 cancers made up 35.9% of all new cancers diagnosed in Maine during 2018.<sup>8</sup> Nationally, in 2018, obesity-associated cancers made up nearly 40% of all newly diagnosed cancers.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, these cancers affect females more than males. In Maine, 22% of all new



cancer cases diagnosed among males in 2018 were obesity-associated as compared to 50% for females.<sup>8</sup> Nationally, obesity-associated cancers made up 24% of all new cancer cases among males and 54% among females.<sup>8</sup> Three of the thirteen cancers associated with obesity (uterine, ovarian, and post-menopausal breast) are specific to females. In 2018, these three cancers alone made up nearly 40% of all newly diagnosed obesity-associated cancers in Maine and explains the higher percentage for females.<sup>8</sup>

**TRENDS IN OBESITY-ASSOCIATED CANCERS**

Overall, in Maine, obesity-associated cancers have been declining for the last 10 to 15 years, mostly due to decreases in colorectal cancer attributed to early and widespread screening. But for those Mainers between 20-49 years old, obesity-associated cancers have risen nearly 20% even though all cancers (excluding obesity-associated) have declined.<sup>8</sup> With cancer there’s a lag time between exposure and the actual cancer diagnosis. This time interval varies by cancer but could be up to a decade or more for obesity-associated cancers. Current obesity-associated incidence data are likely driven by obesity rates from a decade ago or longer. The average weight gain for adults in the U.S. during 2020, or during the first part of the COVID-19 pandemic, was 29 pounds.<sup>9</sup> This increase in weight gain could significantly impact obesity-associated cancer rates in the next decade if the number of adults and children with obesity continues to rise and efforts to mitigate are not addressed.

**WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE OBESITY-ASSOCIATED CANCERS?**

- Use the evidence-based [recommendations](#) developed by the Maine Obesity Advisory Council for multiple settings.
- Promote evidence-based healthy eating and active living strategies identified in [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) and [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#).
- Keep up to date on regular cancer screenings – visit [www.screenmaine.org](http://www.screenmaine.org) for more information.
- Review the obesity objectives and strategies in the [Maine Cancer Plan 2021-2025](#) to find out what individuals and organizations can do to reduce obesity.
- Join [Maine’s Impact Cancer Network](#) to collaborate with people and organizations working to reduce obesity-associated cancer in Maine.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2017/p1003-vs-cancer-obesity.html>

<sup>8</sup> U.S Cancer Statistics Working Group. U.S. Cancer Statistics Data Visualizations Tool, based on November 2020 Submission data (1999-2018) <https://gis.cdc.gov/Cancer/USCS/#/AtAGlance/>

<sup>9</sup> The State of Obesity: 2021 [https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2021ObesityReport\\_Fnl.pdf](https://www.tfah.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2021ObesityReport_Fnl.pdf)

