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News Queensland

Obesity and chronic disease: The scary, confronting truth about your child

One in two Queenslanders now live with a chronic illness like obesity or heart disease, painting a grim picture for the future of the state's children.



Rachel Riley

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@Rach_Riley



3 min read

June 26, 2025 - 6:34AM

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Obesity and chronic disease are big risks for our younger generations.

Queensland is facing raising a generation of children who will die younger than their parents did amid soaring rates of obesity and chronic diseases.

That was the stark warning from the leader of the state's first dedicated prevention agency in charge of reversing our ailing health outcomes.

Health and Wellbeing Queensland CEO Dr Robyn Littlewood said the median age of death in Brisbane had fallen to 82 and in some parts of the Far North were as low as 52.

This is as one in two Queenslanders now live with chronic illnesses like obesity, cardiac disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer.

“If we do nothing, we will get worse and it is predicted that the ‘one’ that has the one in two will have four, five or six chronic diseases,” she said.



Health and Wellbeing Queensland CEO Dr Robyn Littlewood speaking at the QFI Health Forum. Photo: Supplied.

Dr Littlewood said in the late 1990s, type two diabetes in children was unheard of.

Now rates were soaring with children also living with fatty livers and high cholesterol.

Just last week it was revealed by The Courier-Mail that the number of Queensland children injecting prescription drug Ozempic to manage diabetes had risen ten-fold in four years.

“Kids today will live a shorter life than their parents for the first time in Queensland, and you should be outraged at this,” she said.

“In terms of diabetes type two, 90 per cent of it is preventable.

“For heart disease, 80 per cent of it and 40 per cent of cancers are preventable.”

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(L-R) QFI Chief Executive Officer Steve Greenwood, KPMG Health, Ageing and Human Services Partner Sarah Abbott, Metro South Health Health Service Chief Executive Noelle Cridland, Translational Research Institute CEO Professor Maher Gandhi, Health and Wellbeing Queensland CEO Dr Robyn Littlewood, University of Southern Queensland Vice-Chancellor Professor Karen Nelson and Novo Nordisk Oceania Senior Medical Director Dr Ana Svensson at the QFI Health Forum at Tattersall's Club. Photo: Supplied.

Speaking at the Queensland Futures Institute's Solutions for a Healthy State forum in Brisbane, Dr Littlewood said those statistics translated to a shocking 40 per cent of the entire Queensland Health burden being fully preventable.

“We've got the best system here in the world, hands down. I've got to say, though, the funding model does not help with prevention,” she said.

“For the past six years, we’ve done nothing but think about chronic diseases and the way that we can target SNAPO (smoking, nutrition, alcohol, physical activity and obesity).

“It wouldn’t be a panel in 2025 if we didn’t talk about (Brisbane) 2032 so I feel like these are the things that we can get so right and then show the data by 2032 because all eyes are going to be on Queensland.”

Dr Littlewood said Queenslanders were looking for quick solutions and a 24-7 “Amazon” model of care including free access to health coaching online.

She said the “Wellness My Way” pilot programs in Roma, Bundaberg and Logan had seen hundreds of users engage to improve their health in their own time.

Another lifestyle management program created by UQ Health Care, Logan Healthy Living, had resulted in a 10 per cent reductions in hospital admissions and hospital bed days, and a 30 per cent reduction in emergency presentations in the local area.

Metro South Health Health Service Chief Executive Noelle Cridland told the forum another huge hurdle to overcoming poor health outcomes was the attrition of staff and the

increasing number only wanting to work part-time, including 75 per cent of nurses and midwives.

She said hospitals were trialling the use of artificial intelligence to transcribe medical discussions with patients to reduce the burden of documenting medical records, letters to GPs and take home notes.

They are also exploring in which cases clinicians other than doctors, like physiotherapists and nurses, could better treat patients or even prescribe medicines to prevent ramping.

University of Southern Queensland Vice-Chancellor Professor Karen Nelson said attracting and retaining medical staff in the regions was also a focus area.

Of a recent intake of 33 students to a first of its kind remote nursing program in Charleville, 80 per cent went on to continue working in the area.

“It’s only one very small initiative that we need to replicate across all of our health disciplines,” Prof Nelson said.

Originally published as [Obesity and chronic disease: The scary, confronting truth about your child](#)

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David T

5 months ago

Sadly too many children in the recent decade or so have not been parented, they have been pandered to. This is one of the undesired results.

17

Reply



The Joker



5 months ago

UPF fill the freezers of the modern family. Chips, chicken nuggets, pastries, crumbed fish while their pantries are as well. Then there's KFC etc on weekends. Today's kids don't stand a chance. They're constantly being bombarded by all things bad. 😳

16 Reply



Margaret 5 months ago

@The Joker 🇦🇺 . By lazy parents

6 Reply



AOF 5 months ago

@Margaret, And often the problem is also, not so much, "lazy parents" per-se, but ..'time-poor' parents, who, because of their own (*very often self-inflicted*) multiple demands, upon their 'hectic' paced lives, simply don't have the time available to them each day to prepare wholesome fresh and nourishing meals using 'natural, foodstuffs' from scratch, and so they, resort to, grabbing, something 'pre-prepared' (*and often, Chemical Additives, filled*) in a cardboard, of plastic container, from the supermarkets, on their rush home. 😞

2 Reply



Zee 5 months ago

Who eat the same rubbish food.

1 Reply



Uncle Bob proud Queensland man 5 months ago

@The Joker 🇦🇺 - yep

1 2

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Jodi 5 months ago

Easy solution - a sizable 'junk food tax' on fast food soft drinks and processed foods with high sugar and fat content akin to what there is on cigarettes. And see how quickly people change their eating habits. That tax could then go towards the additional costs on the health care system caused by bad diet. With doctors not even allowed to offend people with the 'o' word any more it's the only way to change bad habits and quickly.

1 11

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Martin 5 months ago

@Jodi taxing won't fix it. There's enough tax's and big brother in our lives now. Parents need to be educated and be able to say no.

1 16

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Your sacked DT 5 months ago

@Martin yes it definitely is the dumb parents fault.

1 4

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AOF 5 months ago

@Martin, 'Taxing' ..would, ..certainly, ..fix, it, because people ..vote, with their wallets, especially these economically

constrained days, ..but, ..without, at the same time, making good, wholesome, and healthy, natural, foodstuffs ..easily available, and ..affordable, and also ..teaching, our younger generations ..how, to prepare and cook them to provide healthy and nutritious and filling meals, it simply won't, happen. Back when I went to school, (*back when dinosaurs used to roam the Earth*) the girls, in our classes used to attend what were called Domestic-Science classes, where they were taught, how, to prepare and cook healthy and nourishing meals in their homes, but I don't know, if that, is even taught as a subject, any longer, these, 'modern' days...? 😊

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Mark from Brizvegas 5 months ago

@Jodi How about parents being responsible? You think a tax would stop bad parenting anyway. Personal responsibility is not the government's job. Way too much interaction in peoples lives already with little results.

1 like  Reply



322408 5 months ago

The absurdity is that in a highly reported cost of living crisis the sale of junk food just keeps increasing, There's so much demand for expensive fast food that more chains are making plans to open up in Australia to tap into the profits generated by what are essentially lazy people.

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