

United Against Obesity: A Collaborative South Asian Approach to Addressing the Global Epidemic

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Over the past few decades, the world has transformed dramatically, progressing at an extraordinary pace. Technology has fueled rapid urbanization, improved quality of life, and expanded healthcare access. However, these advancements have also brought a surge in non-communicable diseases (NCDs). As science and technology continue to extend longevity, healthcare professionals face new challenges in managing these patients while maintaining quality of life. The post-COVID era, especially, has seen a rise in sedentary lifestyles, mental health issues, and excessive calorie intake among both children and adults.

Diabetes has surged globally and every prediction of the incidence has only been disappointing as the numbers exceed exponentially. Alongside diabetes, heart disease remains a significant burden among NCDs. However, at the core of these health issues lies obesity, now recognized as a chronic disease and a major global health concern impacting millions worldwide. Obesity contributes to various metabolic, mental, and physical health risks, including heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers, and other chronic conditions. Its causes are complex, often arising from a blend of genetic, environmental, and behavioral factors.

Addressing obesity requires a multi-pronged approach, focusing on education, access to affordable healthy foods, opportunities for physical activity, and policies that promote healthy lifestyle choices. Governments, healthcare providers, communities, and individuals all have roles in tackling this issue. Efforts

should focus on education, access to affordable healthy foods, opportunities for physical activity, and policies that promote healthy lifestyles. By working collectively to raise awareness and implement effective strategies, we can combat obesity and improve global health and well-being.

The South Asian region is recognized as particularly high-risk for diabetes and obesity. Recognizing this, experts from seven South Asian countries—India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan, and the Maldives—formed the South Asian Obesity Forum (SOF) to address these issues both nationally and regionally. Launched at the Sri Lanka College of Endocrinologists' annual congress (SLENDO 2024) in Colombo on August 11, SOF adopted "United against Obesity" as its pledge and tagline. Officially registered in Nepal, SOF is fortunate to have the Asian Journal of Obesity as its official journal. Through research and innovation, SOF aims to drive progress in obesity medicine across South Asia.

The SOF's Colombo Declaration outlines four key areas of focus:

1. Academic and research activities, geared towards sensitizing healthcare professionals about the need for timely obesity prevention and management.
2. Awareness campaigns are designed to educate the public at large, about the need to manage obesity, without stigmatizing persons living with obesity.
3. Advocacy efforts, to engage policymakers and planners, and make anti-obesity drugs and devices available, accessible and affordable to all.

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4. Audits of obesity-related activities across the South Asian region, to ensure addressing and actual needs. SOF reiterates its resolve to conduct a comprehensive campaign against obesity. Its Partnership-based, person-centered, public-inclusive, policy-concordant ethos will drive academic, awareness and advocacy efforts, backed by robust audit.

The SOF is committed to a comprehensive campaign against obesity, with a partnership-driven, person-centered, public-inclusive, policy-aligned approach to academic, awareness, and advocacy efforts, all backed by thorough auditing.

Through this forum, we aim to secure funding for research projects, support clinical trials, and foster collaboration with academic institutions and other national and international societies. This will help drive advancements in obesity treatment and care, leading to new therapies, interventions, and technologies to improve outcomes for patients with obesity and related conditions in this region.

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