

press release

Léger survey shows four out of five Quebecers call for greater support for obesity from the government and public health system

- **Quebecers almost unanimously (97 per cent) agree that obesity has long-term physical, mental and emotional impacts on a person's health**

Mississauga, ON – October 21, 2024 – Novo Nordisk is announcing the results of a recent Léger¹ poll that has been conducted on its behalf, which found that four out of five Quebecers (80 per cent) believe that the Quebec government and the public health system should do more to help people living with obesity and just one in 10 Quebecers (11 per cent) agree with the current Quebec government policies about obesity treatments.

The survey was conducted by Léger as part of a media campaign, initiated and funded by Novo Nordisk, aimed at raising awareness about obesity. The campaign has received support from a diverse group of organizations, healthcare professionals, and individuals living with obesity. All those quoted in the release are participating on a voluntary and independent basis.

Obesity in Québec: Uniting for Better Support

A group of like-minded individuals including patient organizations, healthcare professionals, and people living with obesity – have come together to speak with a unified voice to raise awareness about obesity as a serious chronic disease, breaking down the stigma that people living with obesity often face in Quebec. The group is advocating that people living with obesity should not have to face barriers in accessing immediate support, including paying out-of-pocket for their medicines in Quebec.

“We wouldn’t for a minute think it was acceptable not to provide comprehensive therapy and help for those with other chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure or rheumatoid arthritis, so why is it considered acceptable to ignore helping people whose health is compromised by their obesity?” said Dr. Marie-Philippe Morin, a specialist in general and bariatric internal medicine and head of the general internal medicine department at the Heart and Lung University Institute of Quebec City (IUCPQ).

Since the inception of the Quebec drug plan in 1997, obesity medications have been on the list of exclusions, which has prevented Quebec’s *Institut national d’excellence en santé et en services sociaux* (INESSS) from evaluating these drugs for their therapeutic and economic benefits.

Quebec remains the only Canadian province that does not evaluate obesity drug treatments for potential inclusion in its public drug plan.

According to Statistics Canada, almost three out of 10 Quebecers (29 per cent)² are living with obesity. The group advocates for a clear strategy to ensure that all possible support and potential therapies are available to everyone who could benefit from them.

Understanding Obesity: A Call to Recognize It as a Chronic Disease

Obesity is a serious and progressive chronic disease that has a profound impact on individuals, families, and our healthcare systems.³ Obesity is much more than just excess weight. It is a chronic condition associated with over 200 complications affecting an individual’s health, including type 2 diabetes mellitus, heart disease, high blood pressure, certain types of cancer, as well as decreased life expectancy.⁴

Despite scientific evidence that obesity is a chronic disease, many still consider it to be a lifestyle condition. The Léger poll showed that four out of 10 Quebecers (40 per cent) see obesity as a chronic disease compared to 69 per cent who recognize diabetes as a chronic illness, 65 per cent for cystic fibrosis and 59 per cent for rheumatoid arthritis. Those who recognize obesity as a chronic disease are more likely to agree that genetics (73 per cent), stress and mental health (61 per cent), hormones (51 per cent) and socio-economic factors (51 per cent) are the main causes.

According to the Léger poll, nearly half of Quebecers (48 per cent) believe the government should reassess obesity medications for coverage, and 29 per cent recognize obesity as a

serious condition and argue that the public drug plan should provide access to these medications to help manage weight.

“Obesity is about more than just BMI. It’s influenced by a range of factors beyond personal control such as genetics, hormones and stress. We need a healthcare approach that reflects this complexity,” said Dr. Yves Robitaille, internal medicine specialist at the Centre de Médecine Métabolique de Lanaudière and the CISSS de Lanaudière. “Quebecers living with obesity, and who meet all required criteria, deserve access to medications that science has proven can effectively manage the condition and help reduce its broader socio-economic impact.”

Unified Voices: Additional Perspectives on Obesity

A growing group of advocates, organizations, healthcare professionals, and individuals living with obesity come together to emphasize the urgent need for enhanced support and recognition of obesity as a serious chronic disease, reflecting the overwhelming sentiment among Quebecers for more comprehensive healthcare policies.

“Obesity must be addressed through a multidisciplinary approach that integrates medical, nutritional, psychological, and pharmacological dimensions. By combining these areas of expertise, we can provide effective and sustainable solutions tailored to the needs of each patient. Obesity is recognized as a chronic disease by all major medical associations worldwide. It is time for our government to acknowledge this as well, so that individuals living with obesity who meet specific criteria can have the option to access appropriate treatments.” – Dr. Julie St-Pierre, pediatrician and lipidologist at the CIUSSS Centre-Sud-de-l’île-de-Montréal

“We must shift the attitudes of society and our healthcare systems to recognize obesity as the chronic disease it is and obtain the equitable rigor, understanding, and care given to other chronic diseases. We are at a pivotal moment where science has moved faster than the systems designed to deliver care. This gap has left too many without the support they deserve. Addressing this disparity is not just about improving health—it’s about health equity. All people living with obesity deserve access to the care and resources to improve their health, in Quebec and across Canada. This is a matter of justice.” – Lisa Schaffer, Executive Director, Obesity Canada

“I’ve been living with obesity since childhood, despite leading a very active lifestyle, including swimming and CrossFit. I know the perception that some people may have of people living with obesity, without knowing everything that the person has been through or has tried to change their body image. We need to change attitudes and policies about obesity.” – Émilie Gagnon, Quebecer living with obesity

About the Léger survey

This Omniweb survey was conducted by Léger, on behalf of Novo Nordisk, among the Quebec population with a representative sample of 1,067, aged 18 and over who could express themselves in French or English. Data were collected between August 23 and August 25, 2024. Since a sample drawn from an internet panel is non-probabilistic in nature, the margin of error cannot be calculated for this survey. For comparison purposes, the maximum margin of error for a sample of 1,067 respondents is $\pm 3\%$, 19 times out of 20.

About Obesity Canada

Obesity Canada is Canada’s authoritative voice on evidence-based approaches for obesity prevention, treatment, and policy. Our mission is to improve the lives of Canadians affected by obesity through the advancement of anti-discrimination, prevention, and treatment efforts. For more information, visit obesitycanada.ca.

About Novo Nordisk Canada

Novo Nordisk is a leading global healthcare company, founded in 1923 and headquartered in Denmark. Our purpose is to drive change to defeat serious chronic diseases, built upon our heritage in diabetes. We do so by pioneering scientific breakthroughs, expanding access to our medicines, and working to prevent and ultimately cure disease. Novo Nordisk employs about 63,400 people in 80 countries and markets its products in around 170 countries. For more information, visit novonordisk.ca, [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [X](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [YouTube](#).

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¹ Léger Omnibus Survey, August 2024

² Statistics Canada, An overview of weight and height measurements on World Obesity Day, Waist circumference as an indicator of obesity, March 24, 2024, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/o1/en/plus/5742-overview-weight-and-height-measurements-world-obesity-day>

³ Obesity Canada. (n.d.). About Obesity. <https://obesitycanada.ca/about-obesity/>

⁴ Horn, D. B., Almandoz, J. P., & Look, M. What is clinically relevant weight loss for your patients and how can it be achieved? A narrative review. Postgraduate medicine (2022), 134(4), 359-375