



# Addressing the global health challenge of obesity in Malaysia

## Case Study

2-3 October 2017, London

# Obesity in Malaysia

---

## Context

The global obesity epidemic is one of today's biggest public health problems. Obesity in Asia, especially among children, is increasing at an alarming rate. In Malaysia alone, more than half of the population are classified as overweight or obese.

Obesity places a huge health burden on individuals, exposing them to a greater risk of developing other medical conditions, resulting in a significant economic pressure on the healthcare system. Despite multiple interventions in Malaysia, obesity prevalence continues to rise.

## Workshops

Against this backdrop, a two-day workshop of key stakeholders from Malaysia, the UK and regional LMICs was held on 2-3 October 2017, jointly organised by the Academy of Medical Sciences and the Academy of Sciences Malaysia (ASM). During discussions and breakout sessions of this workshop, participants discussed the extent of the obesity crisis and its challenges, and identified potential strategies to address them.

The workshop summarised the current obesity crisis globally, in the UK, and in Malaysia and the surrounding region. It also identified several specific barriers and challenges encountered in Malaysia for tackling obesity. These centred on a lack of coordination, small-scale research, poor evaluations, lack of data and problems around the prioritisation of obesity interventions.

Participants did note a number of potential solutions to these issues, including better coordination mechanisms, improving research uptake, understanding the key barriers, addressing psychosocial factors, focusing on innovation and changing the mindsets of the public and politicians.

## Outputs

Following the workshop, a written report was produced and disseminated to Malaysian, UK and other LMIC stakeholders to provide a summary of the key next steps that emerged during the workshop discussions.

Short-term:

- To highlight to government that tackling obesity has to be a cross-ministry commitment requiring direction and monitoring at a high level.
- To review the existing ASM Obesity Task Force to ensure the objectives of this group are still relevant for the current obesity situation in Malaysia.
- To promote a holistic view in tackling obesity and its complications.

Long-term:

- To frame obesity reduction explicitly as an integral part of the national development agenda through the 12th Malaysia Plan 2020–2025.
- To develop good quality data, including national level data which should be collected periodically, and disaggregated for appropriate and timely interventions.
- To advocate policymakers to consider 'harder' policies such as imposing a sugar tax, the removal of subsidies on cooking oil and flour, and the use of zero GST to incentivise healthier dietary, physical and mental lifestyles.

## Top three impacts

In addition to gathering evidence, the workshops and report are designed to act as a catalyst for future policy activities and to build the capacity for our national partners in LMICs to do policy work. Hardcopies were disseminated to key stakeholders in Malaysia. The top three impacts from these workshops include:

- The report has been presented to the Science Advisor and Minister of Energy, Science, Technology, Environment and Climate Change (MESTECC) to facilitate cross-ministerial dialogue. It is noteworthy that Tackling Obesity is incorporated in the “Healthy and Fit Malaysia” target of the National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy for 2021-2030.
- ASM has been engaged in governmental and public discussion over the introduction of hard policies to tackle obesity, in particular, the introduction of a soda tax for sugary drinks. The Malaysian soda tax was implemented on 1 July 2019.
- Activation of the ASM Obesity Task Force to consider and carry forward ASM’s roles in short-and long-term recommendations on Obesity.

**To read the full workshop report visit:**

<https://acmedsci.ac.uk/more/news/obesity-malaysia>

**To learn more about our GCRF work visit:**

<https://acmedsci.ac.uk/policy/gcrf>





Academy of Medical Sciences  
41 Portland Place  
London W1B 1QH

 @acmedsci

+44 (0)20 3141 3200  
info@acmedsci.ac.uk  
www.acmedsci.ac.uk

Registered Charity No. 1070618  
Registered Company No. 3520281



Level 20, West Wing, Tingkat 20, Sayap barat,  
Menara MATRADE, Jalan Sultan Haji Ahmad Shah,  
50480 Kuala Lumpur, Wilayah Persekutuan, Malaysia

 @AkademiSains

+60 (3)6203 0633  
www.akademisains.gov.my