

Bexar's diabetes rate climbs to 1 in 7 adults

And 71% of residents are overweight, obese

By Melissa Fletcher Stoeltje and Scott Huddleston STAFF WRITERS



Kin Man Hui / San Antonio Express-News

Dayanara Rico has a class at the Southcross YMCA working out, but 71 percent of the city is obese or overweight.



Tom Reel / San Antonio Express-News

Veronica Ramirez helps locate smartphone apps for people dealing with diabetes.

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[Interactive: Diabetes cases quadruple worldwide since 1980](#)

[Document: Diabetes/ Obesity Fact Sheet](#)

[Document: Diabetes/ Obesity Fact Sheet \(Spanish\)](#)

When it comes to the two health problems city officials



Kin Man Hui / San Antonio Express-News

Participants and instructors gather to celebrate at the end of a workout session at a Y Living diabetes program workout on the Southcross YMCA.



Tom Reel / San Antonio Express-News Thomas Guardia is advised by Veronica Ramirez about ways to combat diabetes as part of a program by the San Antonio Metropolitan Health District at the Grenados Adult and Senior Center.

have deemed “epidemic” in Bexar County — diabetes and obesity — the trend is getting worse.

The portion of adults in Bexar County who have diabetes has steadily increased — from 11.4 percent in 2012 to 14.2 percent in 2014, says a report

released Wednesday by San Antonio Metropolitan Health District officials.

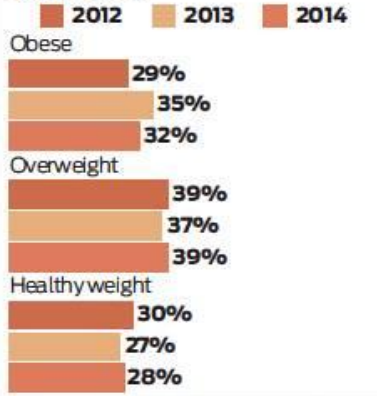
That’s higher than the Texas average of 10.6 percent and well above the national average of 9.3 percent.

Just under 1 million adults — a staggering 71 percent — in Bexar County are overweight or obese, defined as a body weight that it is greater than what is considered healthy for a certain height. Obesity and being overweight is closely linked to a person’s developing diabetes.

Overall, obesity has been on an upward trend, increasing by 10 percent from 2012 to

Obesity in Bexar County

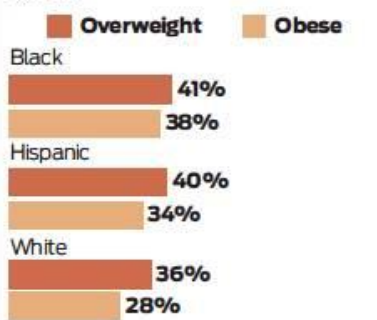
Though the obesity rate fell slightly from 2013 to 2014, it's still higher than in 2012.



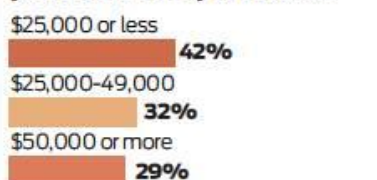
The rate of obesity/overweight is higher in men than women



Persons who are black or Hispanic are more likely to be overweight and obese



Adults who earn below \$25,000 a year are more likely to be obese

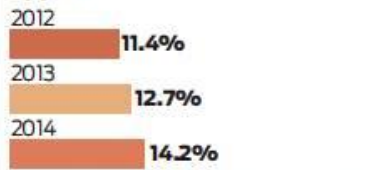


Source: City of San Antonio Metropolitan Health District

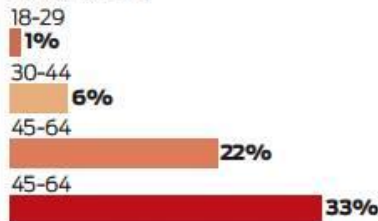
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Diabetes in Bexar County

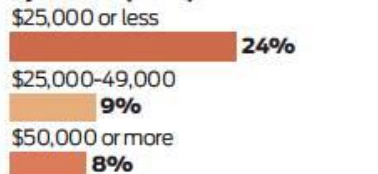
Percentage of adults with diabetes, by year



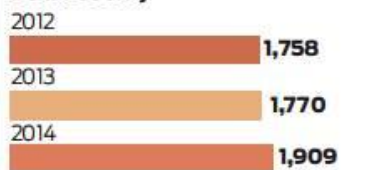
Percentage of adults with diabetes, by age (2014)



Percentage of adults with diabetes, by income (2014)



Number of diabetic amputations in Bexar County



Source: City of San Antonio Metropolitan Health District

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clude teen pregnancy, HIV, sexually transmitted disease, the Zika virus and food-borne illnesses, Nathan said.

mstoeltje@express-news.net

2014.

There was a one-year dip — more than 32 percent of adults in Bexar County were obese in 2014, down from 35 percent in 2013.

In that same time period, the percentage of residents who were overweight stayed flat, hovering between 37 and 39 percent.

As it has done annually for the past three years, Metro Health released its latest chronic disease facts in English and Spanish, including information about health disparities within San Antonio's population.

Based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the data presented a depressing picture for Bexar County.

If the fact that one in every seven adults here has either Type 1 or 2 diabetes isn't bad enough, one of every eight adults has been told by their doctor that they have prediabetes or borderline diabetes.

Metro Health has various free programs to try to help people with the disease.

On Wednesday, in a classroom

at the Granados Senior Center on the Northwest Side, about a dozen people graduated after completing six weekly sessions on the risks associated with diabetes and ways to control or prevent it. The classes provide a forum for people to support one another and share stories about their struggles, or those faced by family members.

A few said they had lost several pounds since starting the program March 2. Others intended to exercise more, drink more water and try to lose weight as part of a personal health plan.

Veronica Ramirez, health program specialist with Metro Health, closed the final session with a visualization exercise.

"Think about how good you feel being able to do this," Ramirez said as seniors in the room at the Granados

center breathed deeply with their eyes shut during the exercise.

Thomas Guardia, 63, said the class reinforced in him the importance of avoiding some of his favorite carbohydrates, including flour tortillas, pasta and white rice, five years after being diagnosed with type 2.

"It opened my eyes to the idea of getting more exercise, portion control, counting calories and knowing the correct things to eat," said Guardia, who wants to lose 10 to 15 pounds. "I'm going to have to eat more fruits and vegetables, and avoid fast food."

Alicia Farias, had been diagnosed with type 2 in 1995, but was downgraded to "prediabetic" status in 2006. She has developed diabetic neuropathy — nerve damage that can cause pain, tingling or numbness in the hands, feet and legs.

While many associate diabetes with amputation, blindness and kidney disease, Farias, 74, said the 15-hour course reminded her of the significant links between diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

"I know the kind of problems that can occur. It's just good to get a refresher course," she said.

The self-management program is one of three free diabetes awareness programs the district offers in coordination with the YMCA of Greater San Antonio. The classes typically are offered at libraries, churches and clinics. More information is available by calling 210-207-8802.

The statistics released Wednesday reflect the city's socioeconomic disparities — the lower a person's income or education level, the higher the chance they will develop diabetes or be overweight or obese.

There are racial disparities as well — 38 percent percent of African Americans and 34 percent of Hispanics are obese, compared to only 28 percent of Anglos. Fifteen percent of African Americans and Hispanics have diabetes, vs. percent of Anglos.

Men are more likely than women of being overweight or obese in Bexar County — 78 percent vs. 65 percent.

"These problems have multiple social factors — poverty, housing, working conditions, access to healthy food, safe neighborhoods," said Jennifer Herriott, assistant director of Metro's community health division. "We know that place matters. We must all work together to create healthy environments."

Herriott emphasized all the positive steps the health department, as well as other partnering agencies and the city, have taken to reduce obesity and diabetes, everything from free fitness programs and healthy eating initiatives to *Síclovia*, the city's twice-a-year event in which a major street is closed to vehicles so people can freely walk, run, skate, bicycle. Last Sunday, the 10th — and longest — *Síclovia* stretched from Maverick Park to Roosevelt Park, drawing thousands of people.

She touted the city's development of new trails, sidewalks and bicycling programs, but acknowledged reversing the negative trends will take time and effort.

"The problem with obesity and diabetes took 30 years to get to where we are, and it's going to take years and years until we start seeing a downward curve," she said.

City Councilman Mike Gallagher of District 10 stressed that the negative trends in diabetes and obesity take a huge toll across the city — economic losses, job losses, too many families caught up in tragedy. People with diabetes are at higher risk of developing serious health problems, such as blindness, kidney failure and stroke.

"We've got to figure out how to solve these problems," he said, noting that he personally takes part in a group walk in his neighborhood each morning.

One of the more startling statistics from the data release concerned a dramatic rise in the number of diabetic amputations, which jumped from 1,758 in 2012 and 1,770 in 2013 to 1,909 in 2014.

Dr. Vincent Nathan, the health department's interim director, said the increase may simply reflect the fact that a growing number of physicians are performing lower-limb amputations.

"We don't know why and I wouldn't want to speculate," he said.

Other health issues that the health department tracks in-

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