

# Evolving Policies Regarding Obesity as a Disease and Their Implications

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February 8, 2020

# Disclosures

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- **Professional fees**
  - Novo Nordisk
  - Nutrisystem
- **Personal biases that favor:**
  - Evidence-based interventions, both prevention and treatment
  - Respect for people living with obesity
  - Critical thinking about all evidence

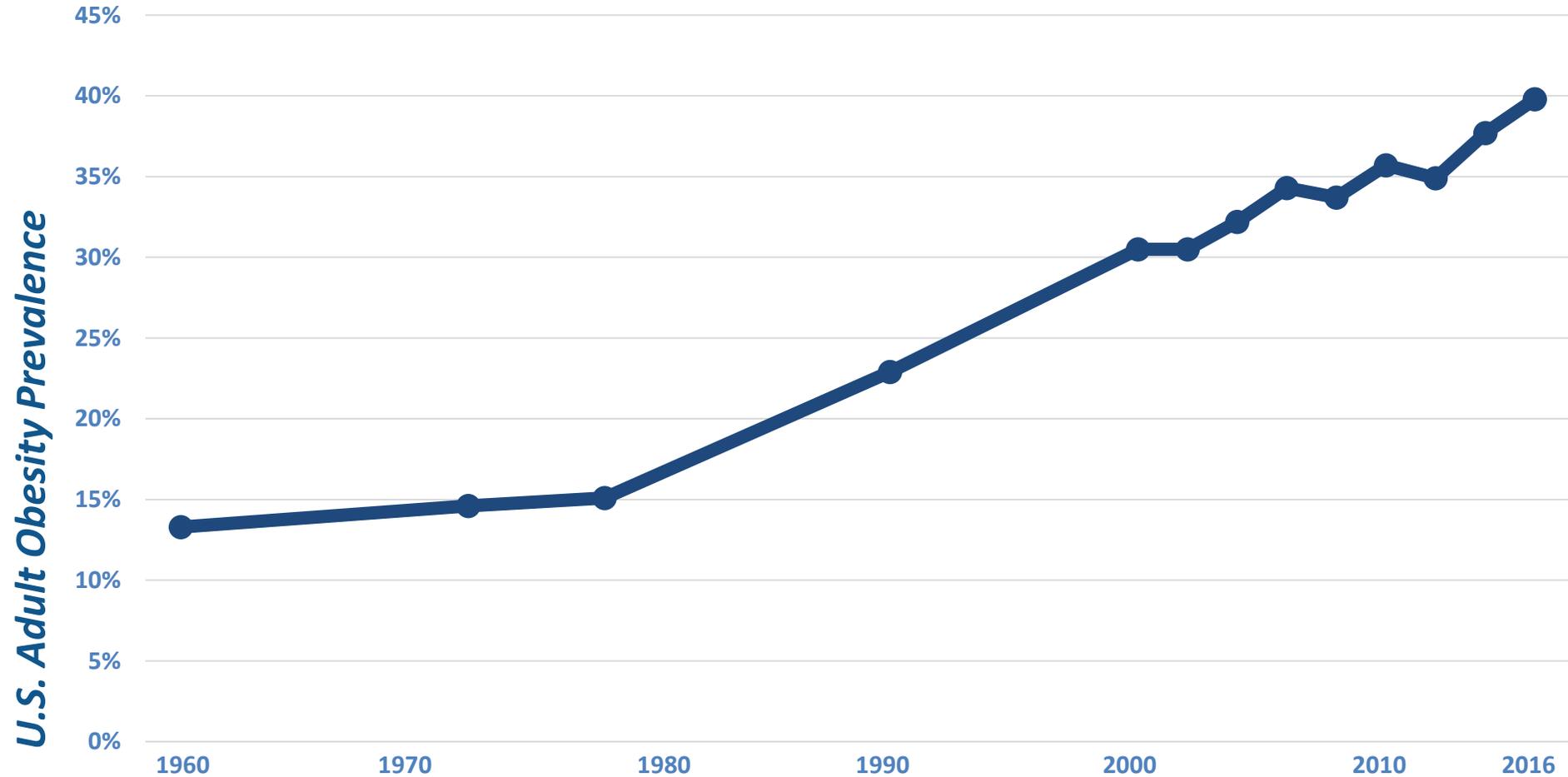
# Presentation Objectives

- Describe how obesity came to be viewed as a complex chronic disease
- Identify the significance of this perspective and its implications
- Explain the gaps that remain in providing good obesity care



Source: Pawel Loj / flickr

# Four Decades of Rising Obesity



# Four Decades of Ineffective Efforts to Reduce Obesity

- 1974

“Most Obesity Could, with Care, Be Prevented”

doi: [10.1016/S0140-6736\(74\)93004-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(74)93004-9)

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## THE LANCET

Volume 303, Issue 7845, 5 January 1974, Pages 17-18

### Infant and Adult Obesity

OBESITY is the most important nutritional disease in the affluent countries of the world. In the absence of an internationally agreed criterion for diagnosis an exact figure for prevalence cannot be given, but surveys in Britain and the United States show that about a third of the population is overweight to an extent associated with diminished life expectancy.<sup>1</sup>

The exact significance of hyperplastic and hypertrophic obesity is still not clear, but on balance the evidence suggests that we need to be more vigilant in preventing obesity throughout childhood. Probably the obese adult can never be “cured”, but most obesity could, with care, be prevented.

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# Four Decades of Ineffective Efforts to Reduce Obesity

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Most Obesity Could, with Care, Be Prevented
- 1986  
“Unique Merits of Low Fat for Weight Control”  
doi: 10.1016/0306-9877(86)90125-8



<https://www.snackwells.com/product/devils-food-cookie-cakes>

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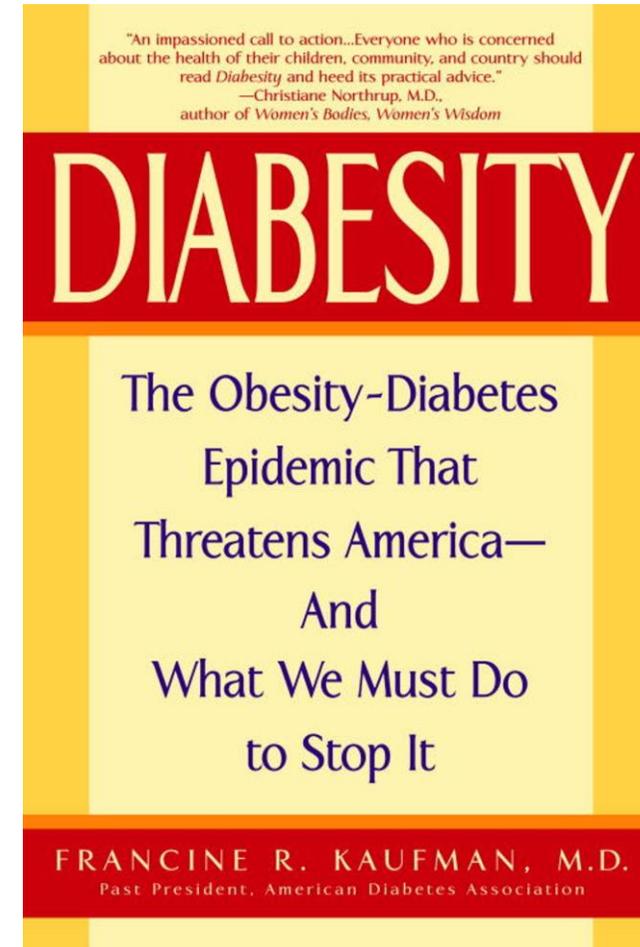
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Clinical Guidelines for Overweight and Obesity  
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Primary Care, illustration © Morgan Schweitzer / flickr

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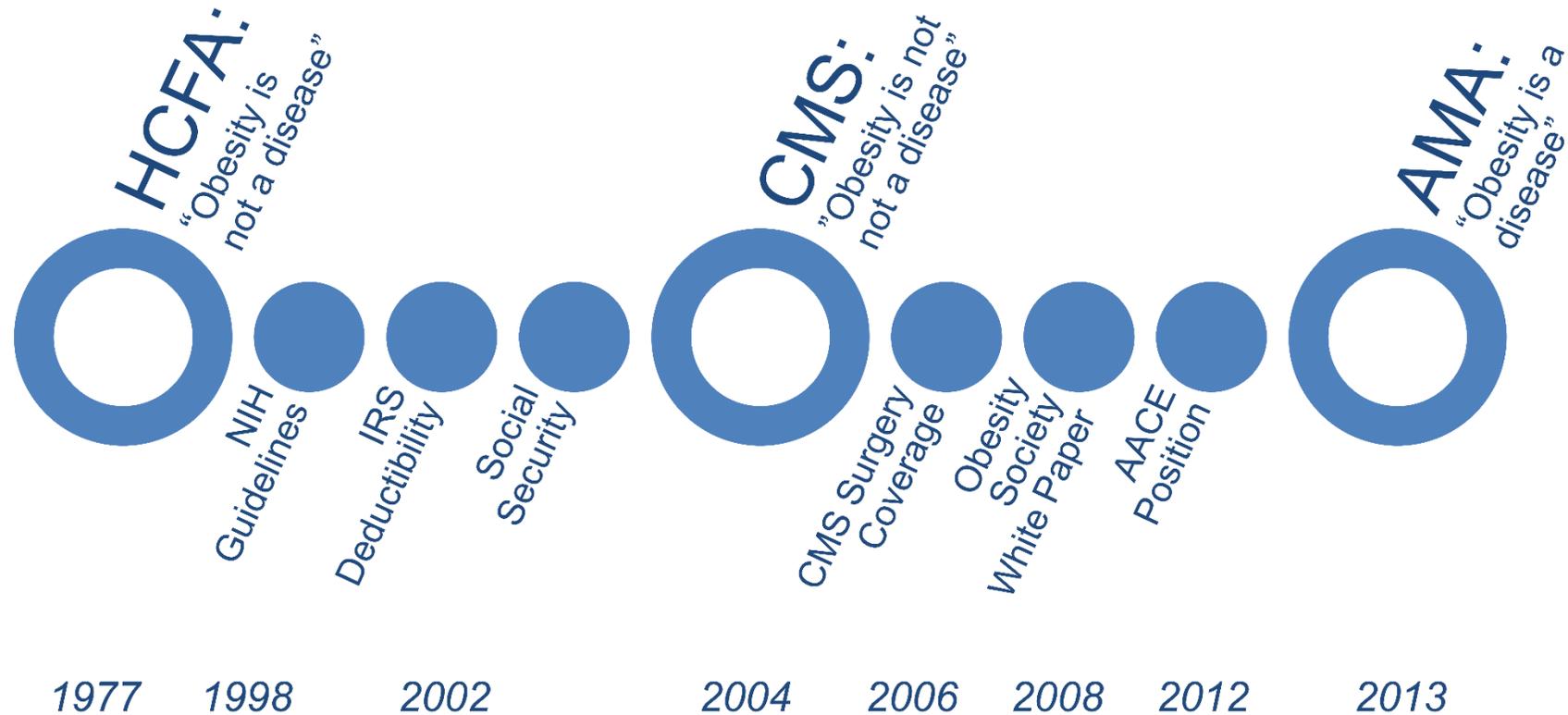
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Let's Move! doi: [10.1089/chi.2012.0800.obam](https://doi.org/10.1089/chi.2012.0800.obam)

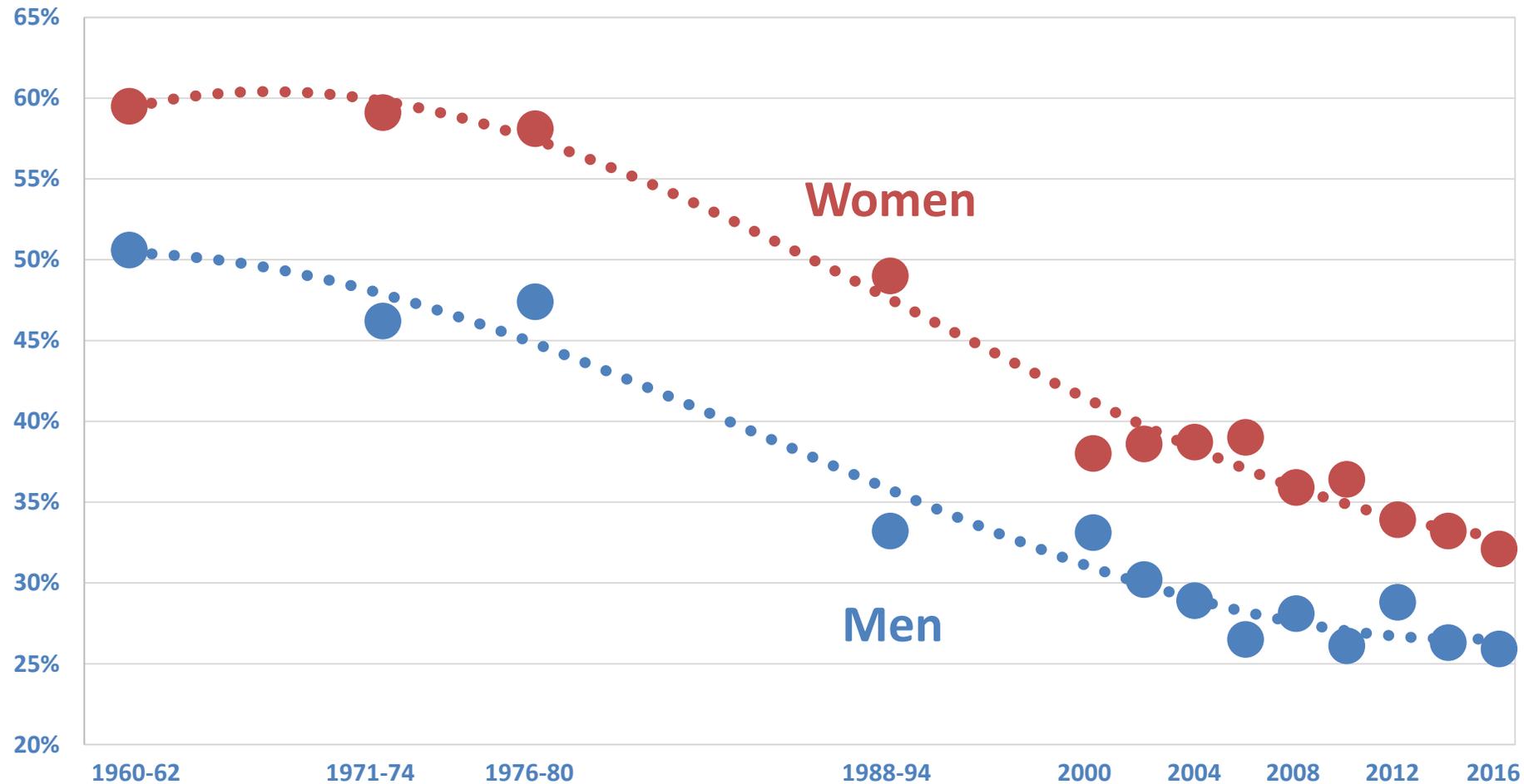


# In 1977, Obesity Was Officially Not a Disease

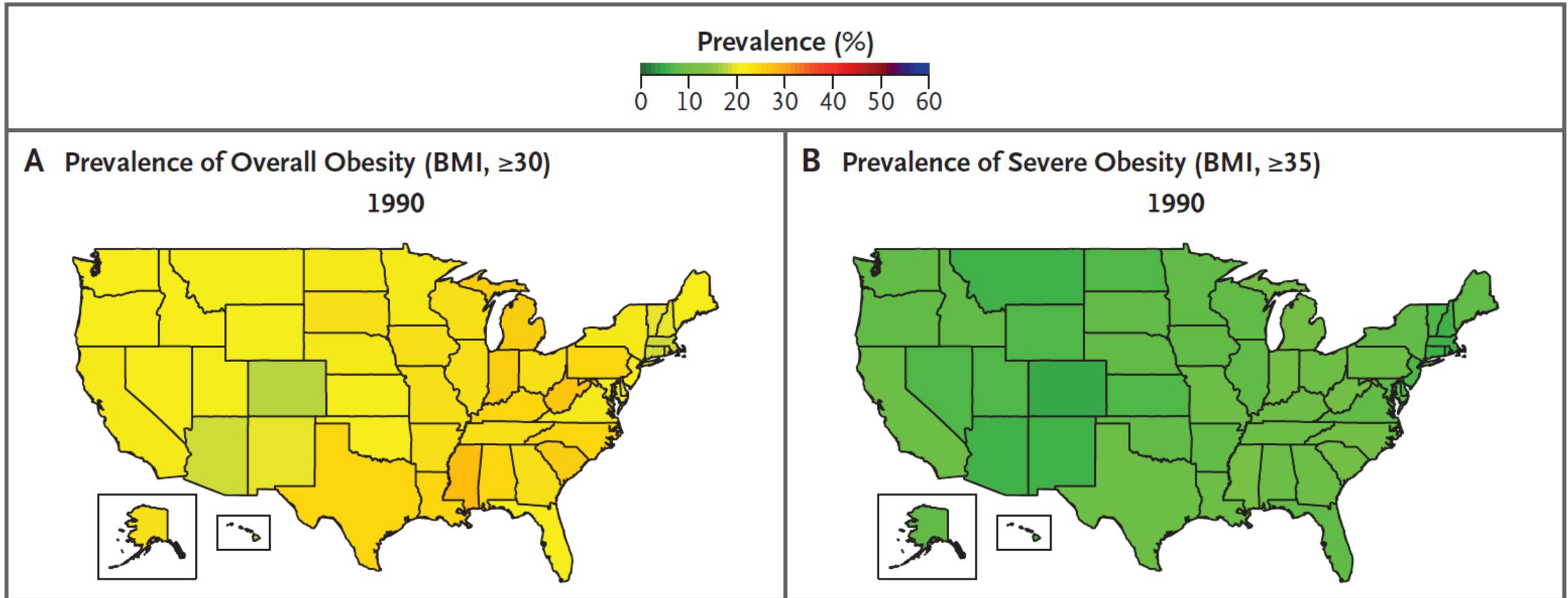
## Milestones in Regarding Obesity as a Disease



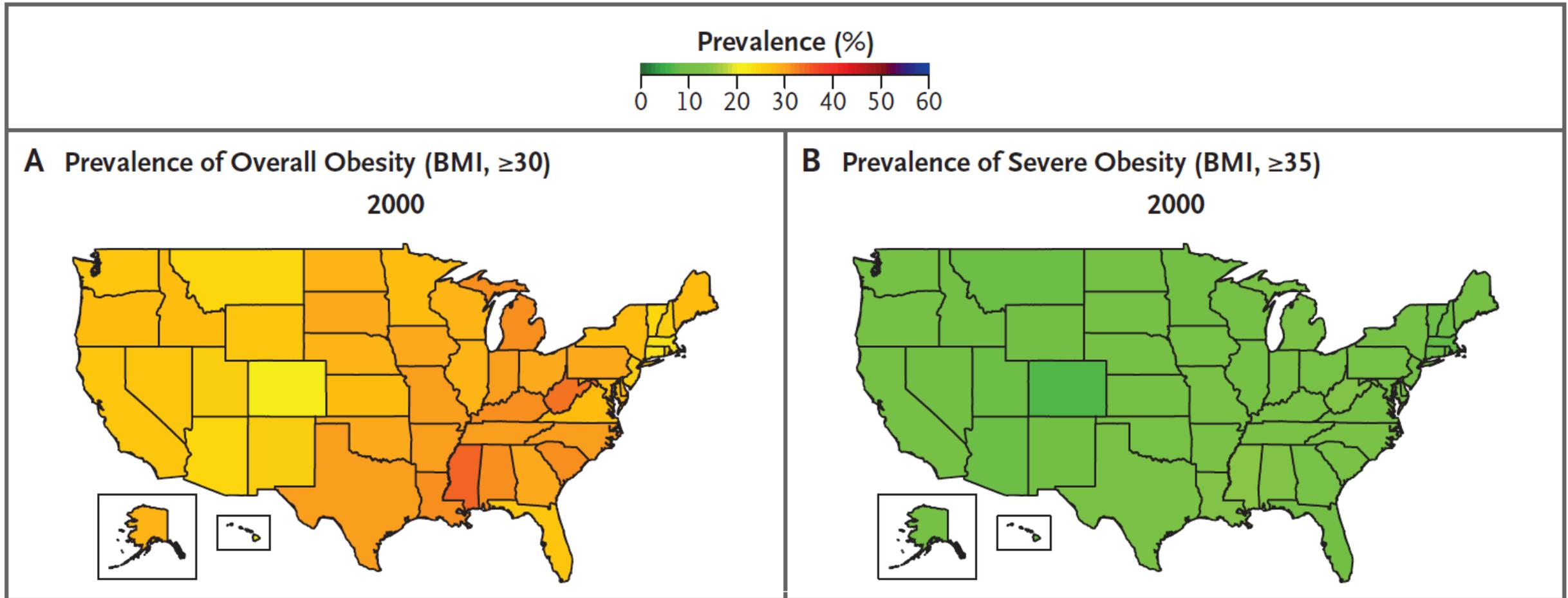
# Prevalence of BMI < 25 May Be Bottoming Out



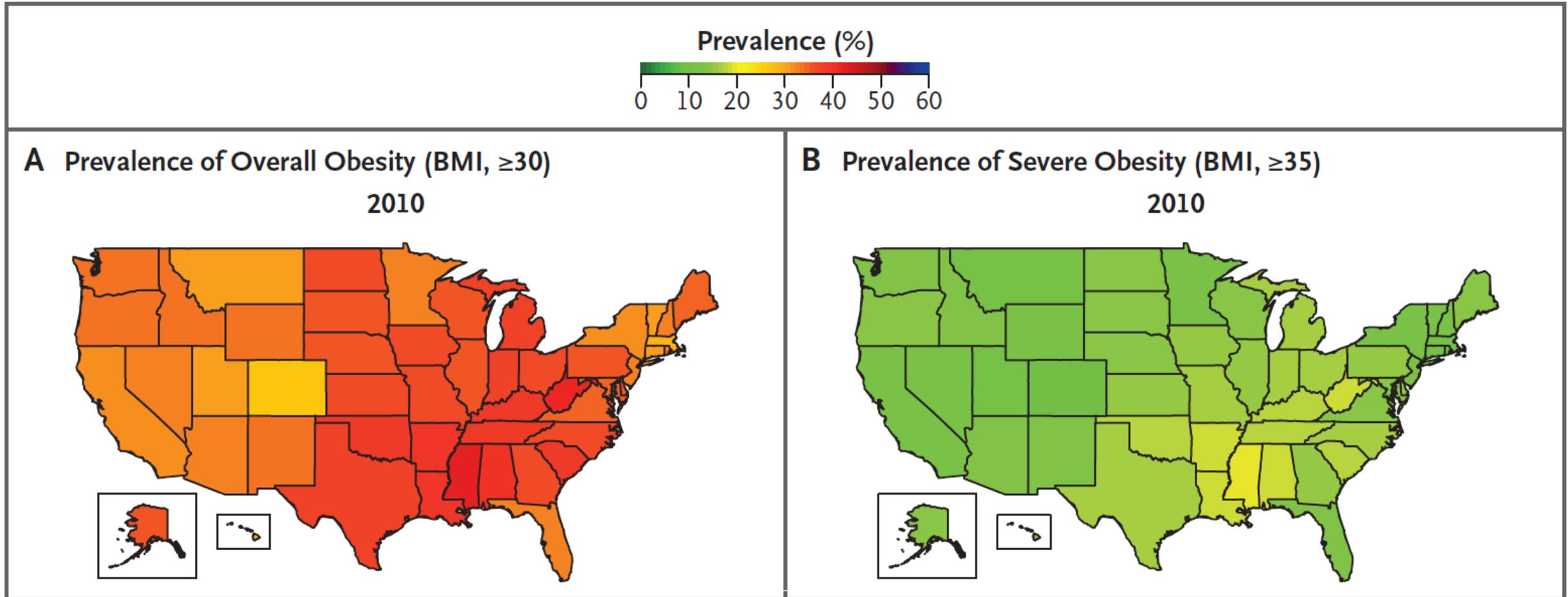
# But Obesity and Severe Obesity Are Still Growing



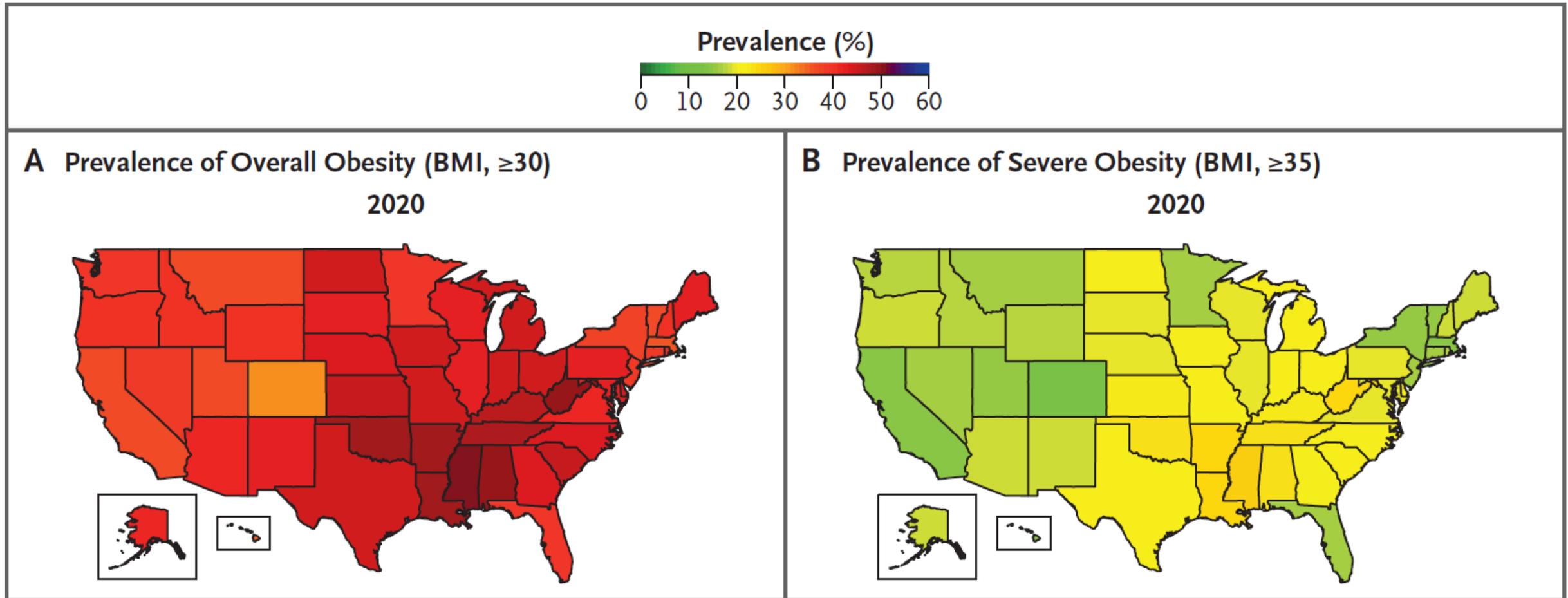
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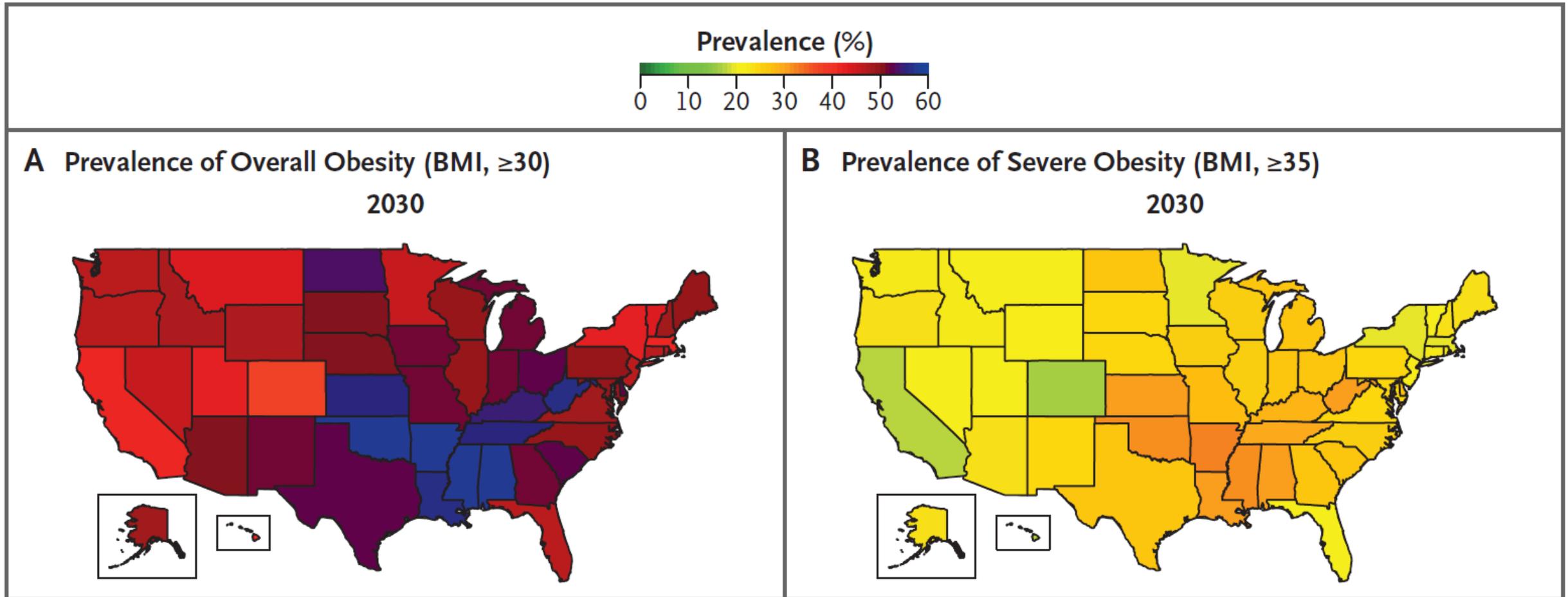
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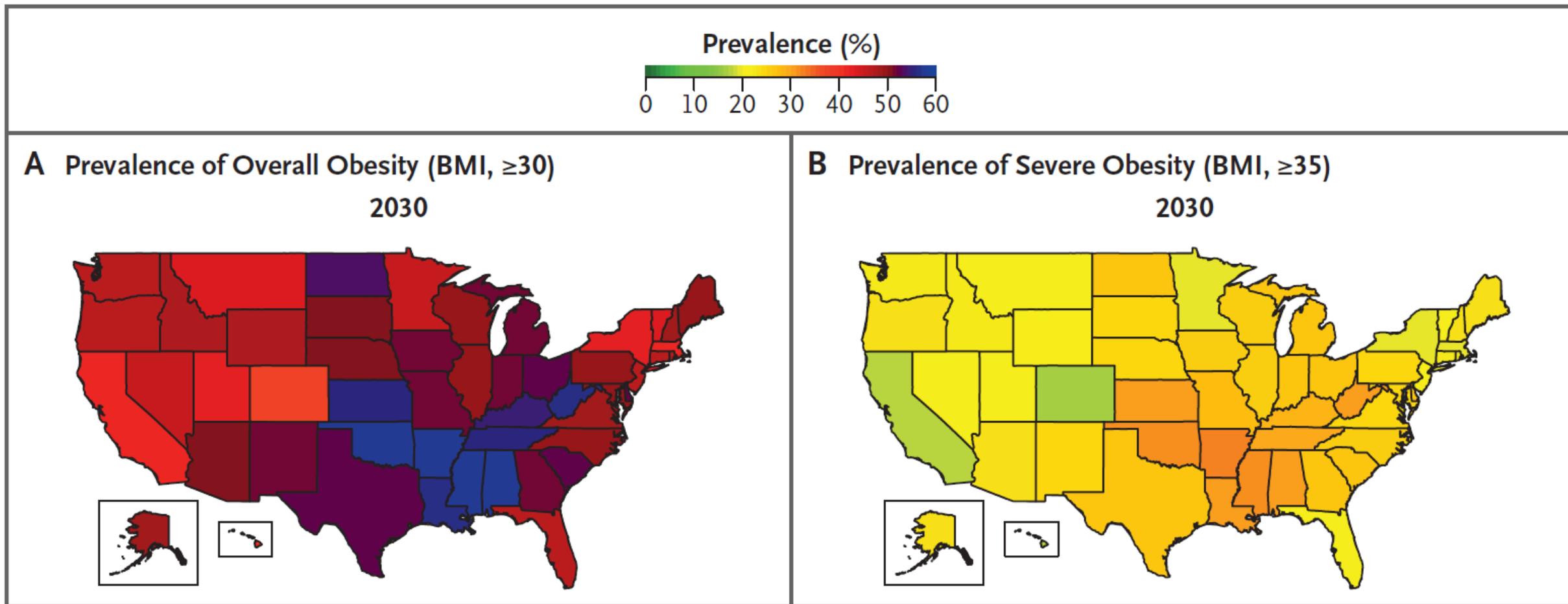
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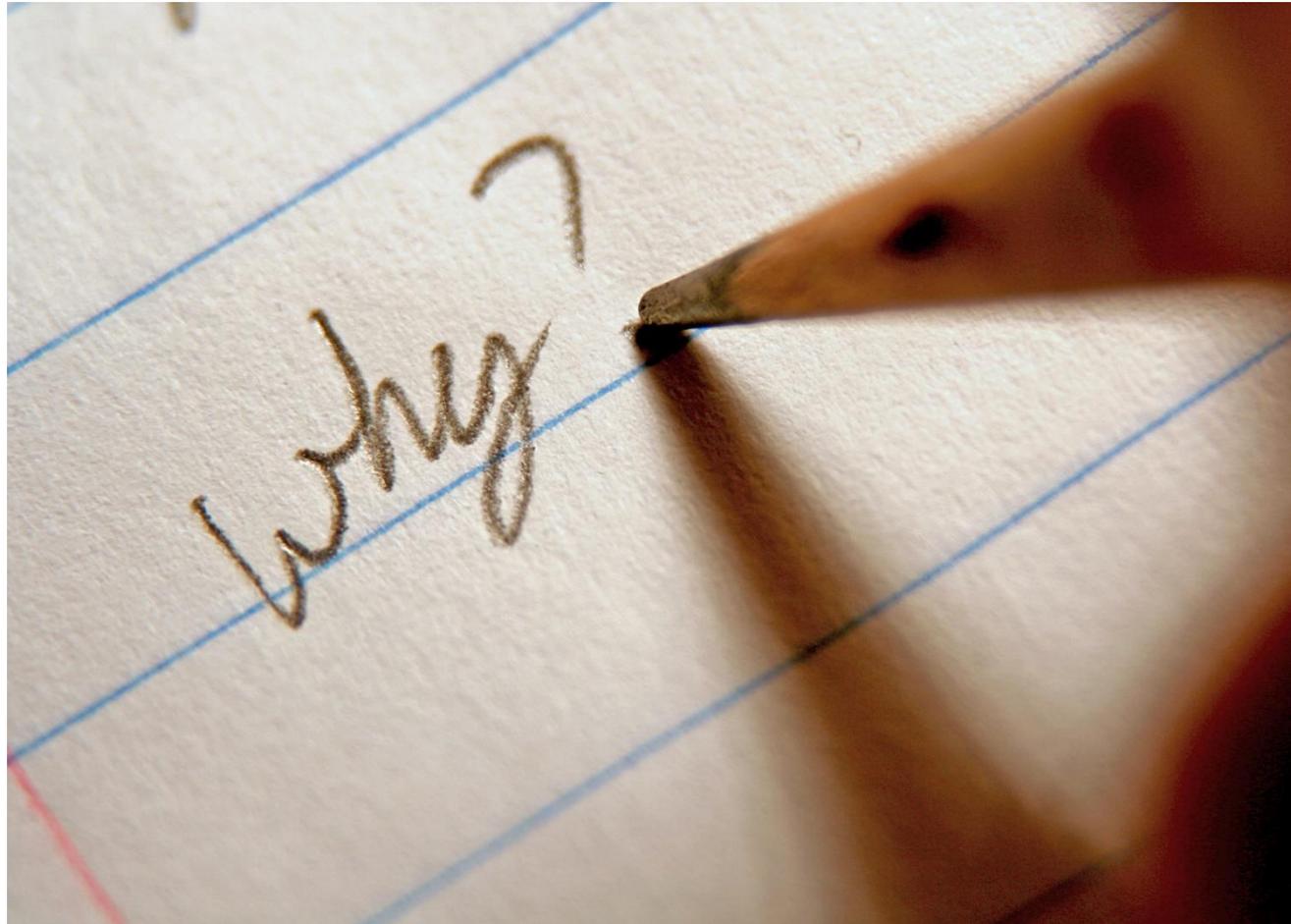
# Obesity Will Reach 50% Prevalence by 2030



# Growing Fastest, Severe Obesity Will Reach 25%



# Why Has Progress Been So Elusive?



Good Question, photograph © Eric (e-magic) / flickr

# Two Kinds of Bias Get in the Way

- **Intellectual bias**  
favoring personal convictions
- **Weight bias**  
directed at people with obesity



God Judging Adam, Etching by William Blake / WikiArt

# Even Today, Healthcare Providers Misunderstand Obesity

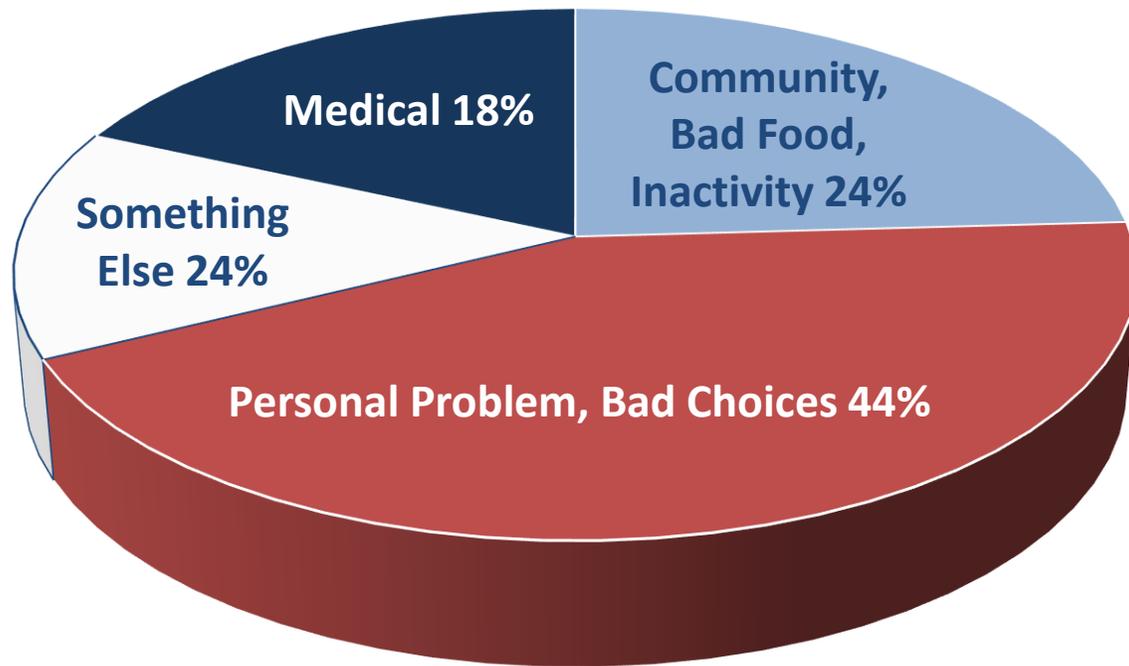


*"Let's confront the **elephant** in the room. Healthcare policy should promote personal **responsibility**, rather than encourage free riders. In America we are free to **overeat** and **under-exercise** but we have **no right** to make **innocent bystanders pay** for the consequences."*

– Marilyn M. Singleton, MD, JD  
Past President, Association of American Physicians and Surgeons  
Jan 11, 2020

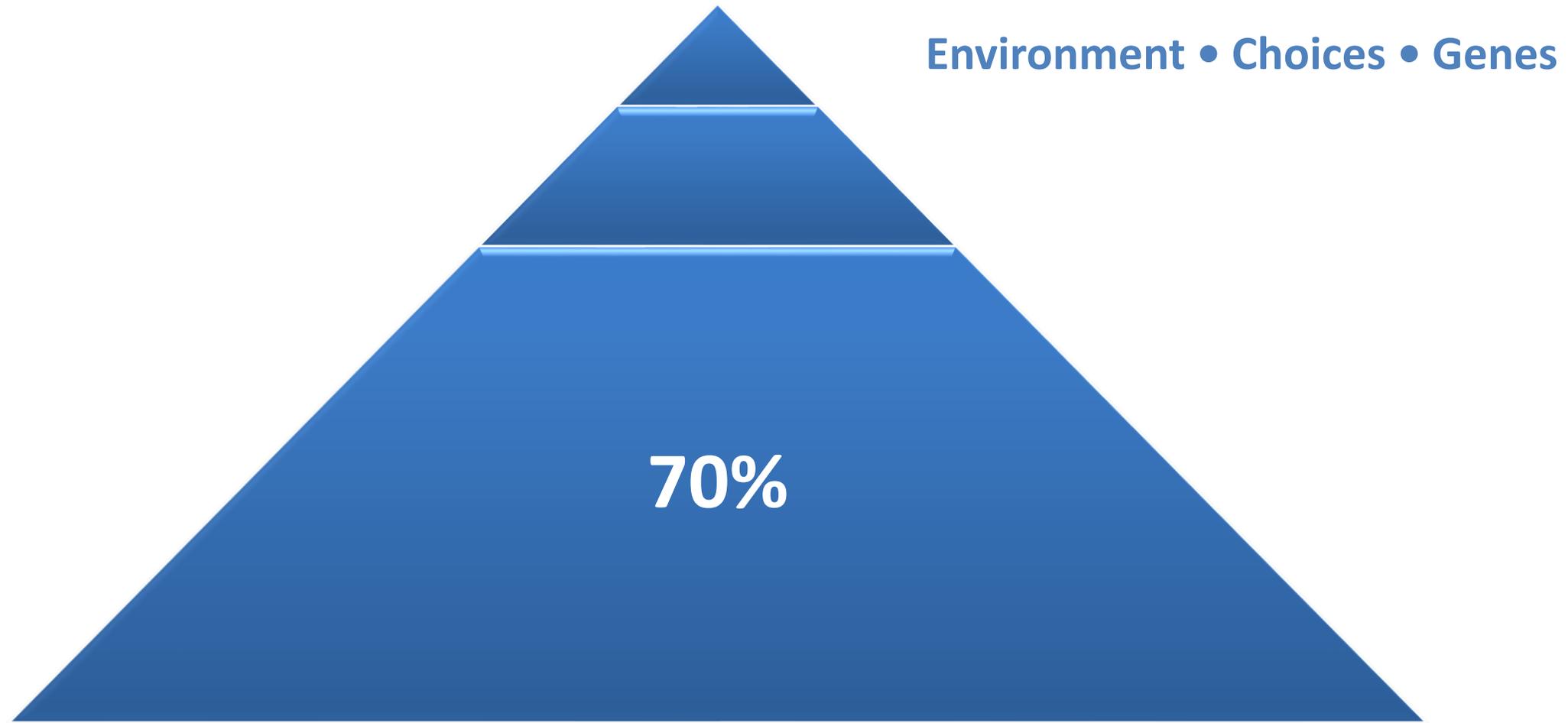
# Obesity: Often Viewed as a Matter of Choice

“Which phrase comes closest to describing the type of problem that you think obesity is?” (Feb 2013)

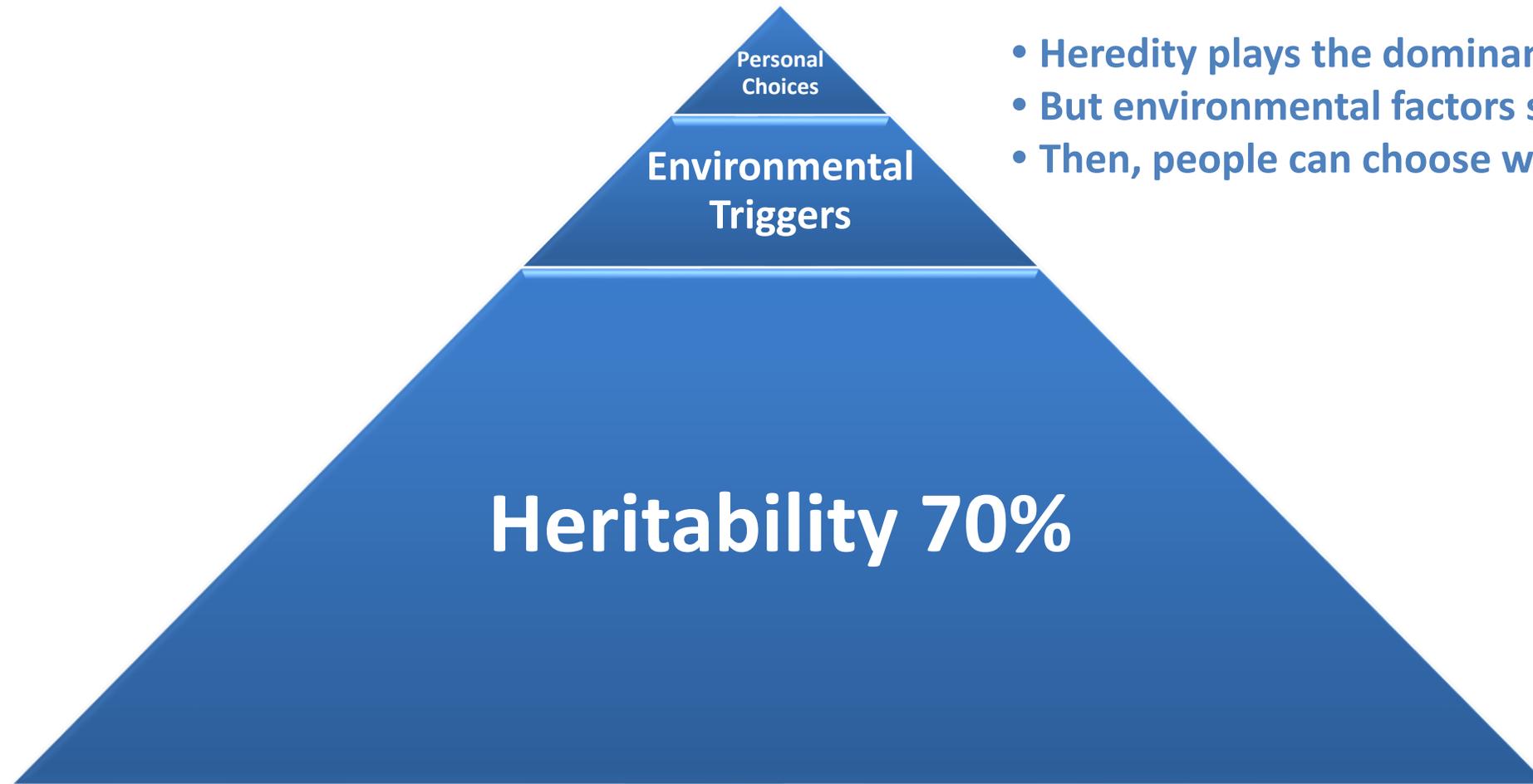


- **Bad personal choices was the dominant explanation in 2013**
- **Data from ongoing tracking**
- **Respondents asked to pick one**

# People Typically View Obesity as the Result of Poor Choices



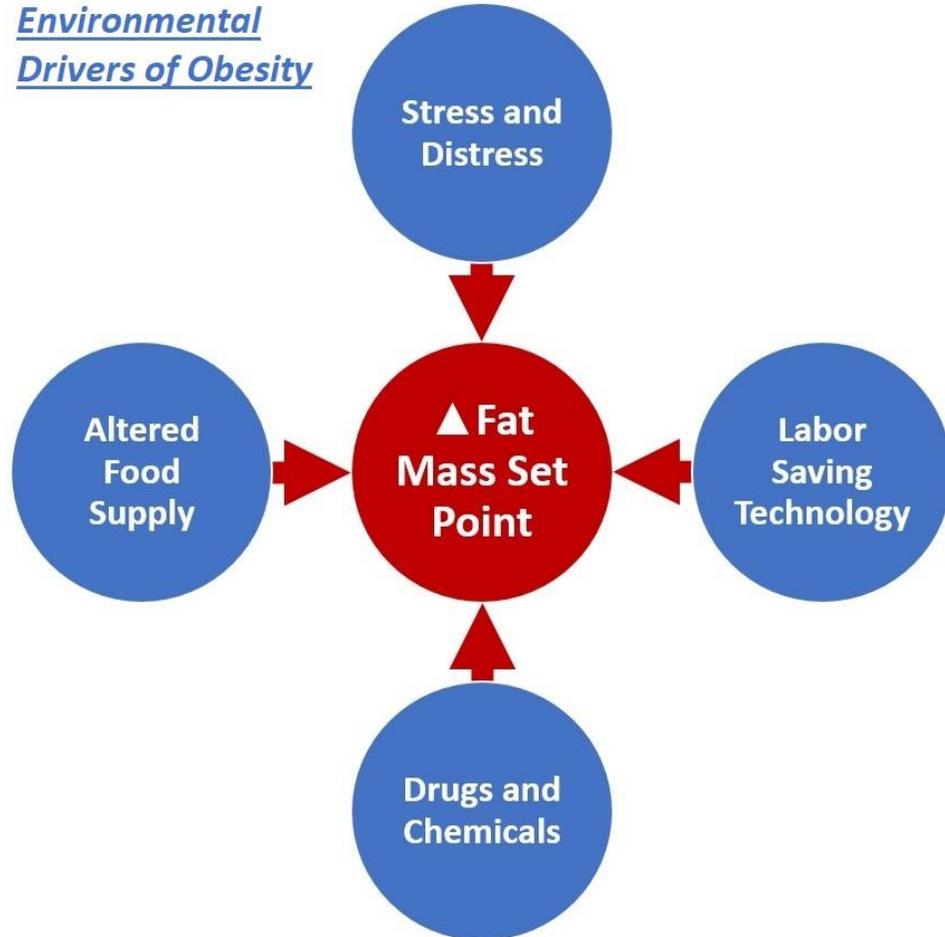
# The Truth Is Obesity Is a Highly Heritable Chronic Disease



- Heredity plays the dominant role in obesity risk
- But environmental factors serve to activate it
- Then, people can choose what to do about it

# Ever More Obesity from a Perfect Storm of Environmental Triggers

## Environmental Drivers of Obesity



- Simplistic explanations are invariably wrong
- The more accurate view is a perfect storm of multiple factors

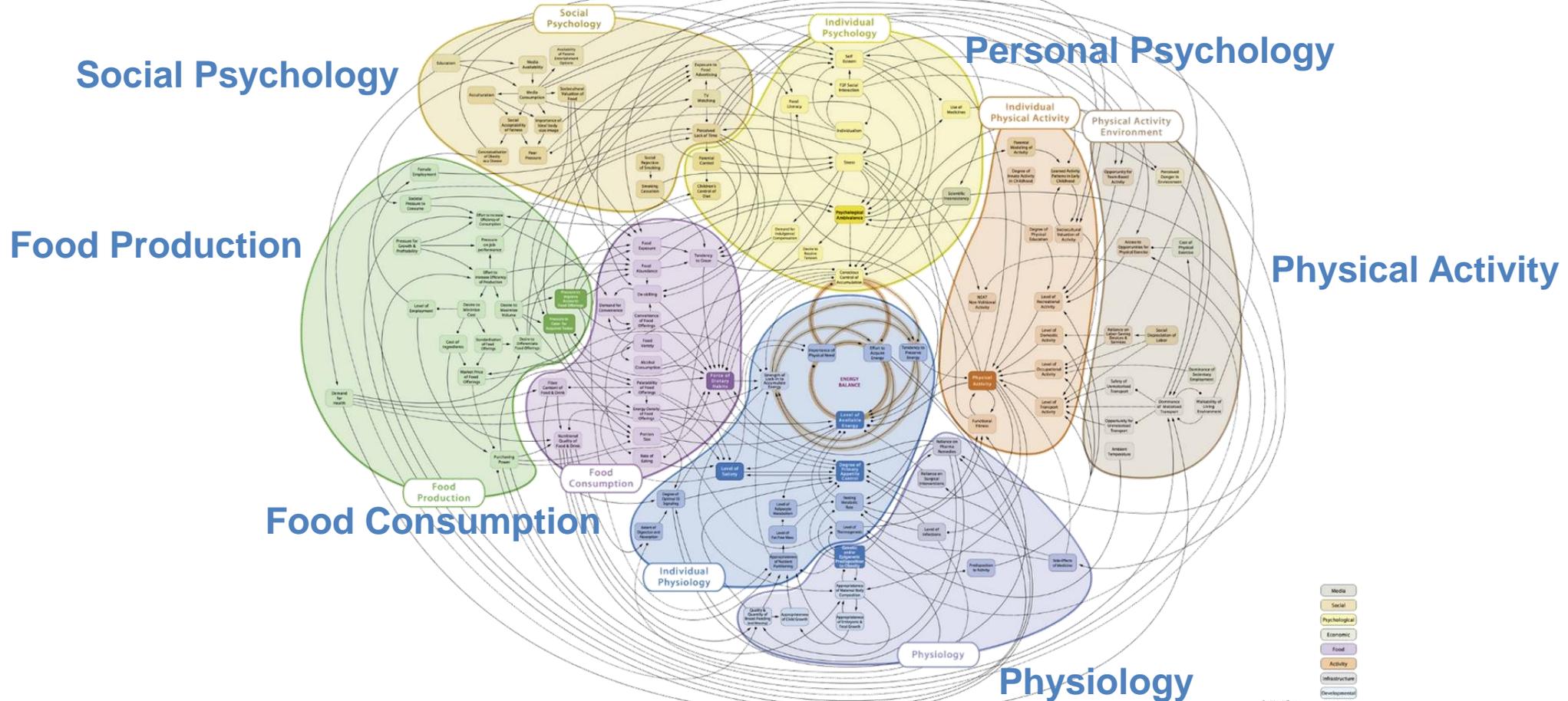
# Rocket Science Is Complicated . . .



GPM Core Observatory, illustration by NASA Goddard Space Flight Center / flickr

# ... But Obesity Is Far More Complex

Obesity System Map  
Variable Clusters



# Weight Bias Comes from Demeaning Stereotypes

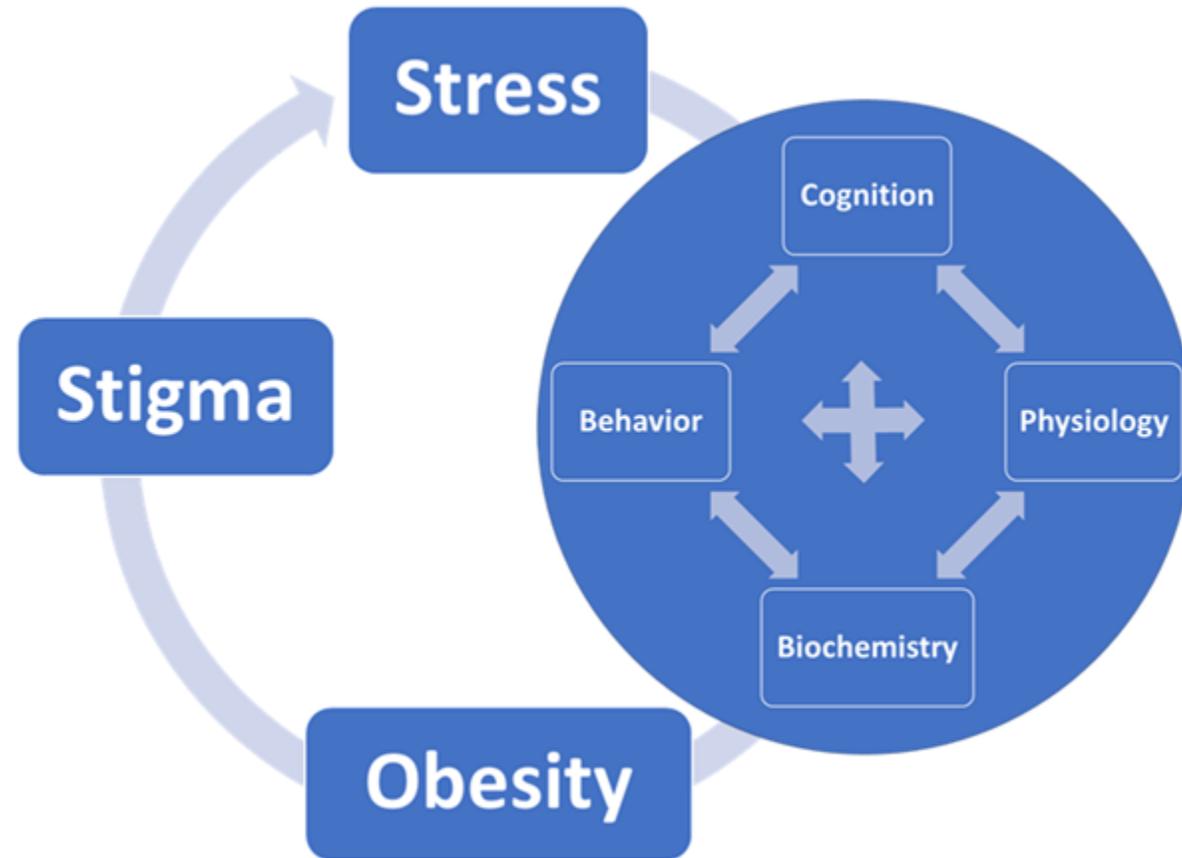


*In the Kitchen, photograph © Obesity Action Coalition / OAC Image Gallery*

- Lazy
- Stupid
- Undisciplined
- Sloppy
- Dishonest
- Won't follow directions
- Uniformly unhealthy
- Ignorant about nutrition
- Diets of junk food

# Living with Bias & Stigma Makes People Sicker

*Pathways from stress to obesity*



# Explicit Bias Is Down, But Implicit Bias Is Growing

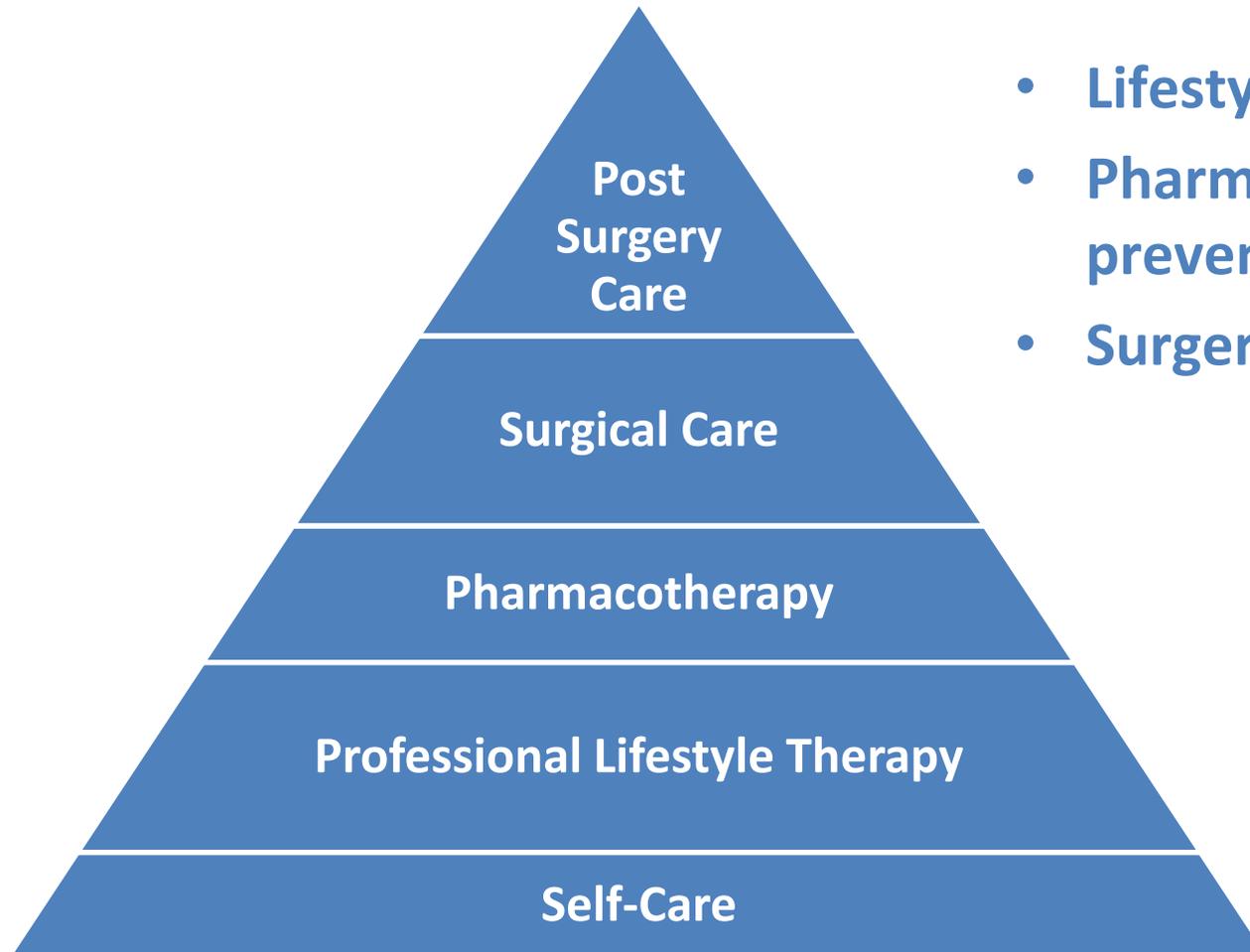
Dimension	Explicit Bias Trend 2007-2016	Implicit Bias Trend 2001-2016
Sexuality	Down	Down
Race	Down	Down
Skin Tone	Down	Down
Age	Down	Flat
Disability	Down	Flat
Weight	Down	Up

Source: Charlesworth and Banaji, 2018, Patterns of Implicit and Explicit Attitudes, Long-Term Change and Stability From 2007 to 2016

# Because of Bias, Self-Care Is Often the Only Option Available for Obesity

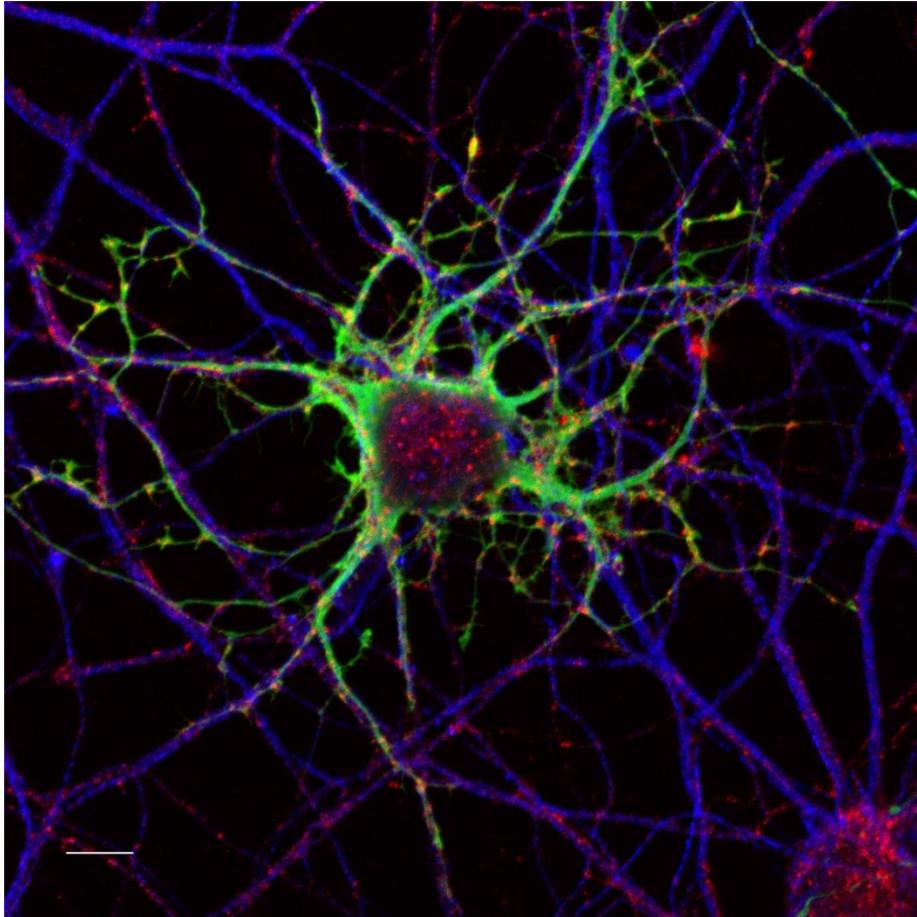


# Good Obesity Care Works to Prevent and Even Reverse Type 2 Diabetes



- Lifestyle therapy can prevent diabetes
- Pharmacotherapy can prevent progression to diabetes
- Surgery can put diabetes into remission

# Obesity Science Is Bringing Better Insights and Solutions



Neurons, photograph © ZEISS Microscopy / flickr

- The hypothalamus controls fat mass and blood sugar
- Robust evidence for bariatric surgery
- A strong pipeline of better therapies

# Major Milestones in the Decade Just Ended

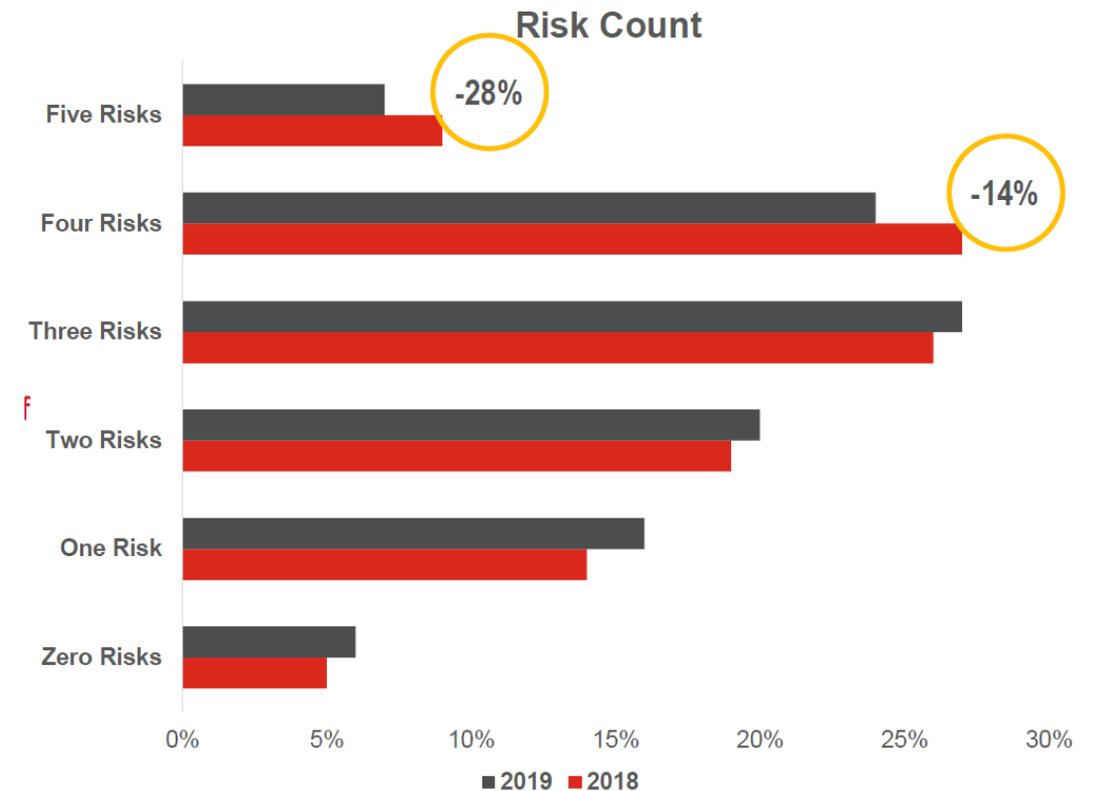


Milestone, photograph © Ztim Green / flickr

- Explicit bias is down
- New drugs for obesity
- Bariatric surgery for diabetes
- A whole new specialty for obesity
- Vibrant support & advocacy

# Strategic Initiatives Are Advancing Obesity Care

- Treat & Reduce Obesity Act
- Core Competencies for Obesity Care
- Standard of Care for Obesity Care
- Comprehensive Obesity Care Benefit
- Shining a light on best practices



# Patient Centered Systems for Obesity Care Can Make a Big Difference

- Reduce diabetes and obesity impact
- Work culture that promotes health and well-being
- Diabetes prevention
- Access to obesity care
- Respect for personal autonomy



Targets of Opportunity, photograph by Randy Robertson / flickr

# More Information

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