Obesity in the United States has increased rapidly over the past several decades. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports obesity affects about 93 million U.S. adults and nearly 14 million children and adolescents.

Obesity has considerable implications on public health. Obesity leads to a greater risk diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers, and a shorter lifespan. The CDC reports that the estimated annual medical cost of obesity in the United States was $147 billion in 2008 U.S. dollars.

Researchers at the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health (Milken Institute SPH) have conducted significant research into the various health and socioeconomic factors that affect obesity:

- **A study** published in November 2018 by the STOP Obesity Alliance (STOP), based at the Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness at Milken Institute SPH, that assessed coverage of obesity prevention and treatment in state Medicaid and state employee health insurance plans. The research found that coverage of three recommended types of obesity treatment (nutritional counseling, medications, and bariatric surgery) improved over the last decade. The research also found that state coverage is inconsistent and barriers exist that prevent people with obesity from accessing evidence-based, effective treatments.

- **A 2019 study** by Loretta DiPietro, PhD, MPH, a professor of exercise and nutrition sciences, found the combination of obesity and an inactive lifestyle were a risk factor for developing mobility loss after age 60. The research suggested older adults can reduce their risk by increasing moderate physical activity and incorporating mild strength training into their routines.

- William Dietz, MD, PhD, Chair of the Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness, published an editorial in JAMA that called for new efforts to prevent obesity in young adults. He wrote that young adult between the ages of 20 and 39 are not often targeted in prevention efforts but can be crucial in combatting obesity in future generations.

- Dr. Dietz co-chaired The Lancet Commission on Obesity, which released a report in January 2019 finding global leaders must address commercial interests and rethink global economic incentives within the food system in order to tackle the joint
pandemics of obesity, undernutrition and climate change, which they labeled “The Global Syndemic.”

- A commentary by Dr. Dietz published in *Pediatrics* explained why social and environmental conditions may affect studies aimed at the prevention of obesity in low income Hispanic and African American children.

- The Building Community Resilience (BCR) Collaborative, housed at Milken Institute SPH, conducted research examining unhealthy environmental factors that increase the risk for obesity and other health conditions.

- Consumption of low-calorie sweeteners jumped by 200 percent in U.S. children, raising concerns about the link between artificial sweeteners and obesity, according to a study by Allison Sylvetsky, PhD, an assistant professor of exercise and nutrition sciences.

- Children and teens who reach for low-calorie sweetened beverages are consuming about the same number of calories as kids who drink sugary sodas—so say the results of a second study by Dr. Sylvetsky. The results challenge the idea that diet sodas can help with weight loss.

- A 12-week intervention helped Latino families replaced high-calorie, sugar sweetened beverages with a healthier alternative – water, according to a study conducted by Uriyoán Colón-Ramos, ScD, MPA, an associate professor of global health. Sugary beverages are one factor that can increase the risk of obesity.

- Federal food aid sent to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, contained lots of chips and candy but failed to meet dietary guidelines for added sugars, sodium and saturated fats, said a study conducted by Dr. Colón-Ramos. Such foods can make it harder to maintain a healthy weight or to control blood sugar.

- Research by Todd Miller, PhD, an associate professor of exercise and nutrition sciences, found certain high-energy video games may help inner-city youth increase physical activity and reduce their risk of obesity.

- Dr. Dietz authored a commentary in *Pediatrics* that suggested education on caloric sugary drinks has helped public health officials make progress toward reducing obesity among children nationwide.

- A study by Amanda Visek, PhD, an associate professor of exercise and nutrition sciences, looks at the factors that make sports fun for kids and finds winning is less important than trying hard. The findings are key to helping kids stay involved in organized sports and can help them maintain a healthy body weight.

- The Avance Center for the Advancement of Immigrant/Refugee Health, based at Milken Institute SPH, conducted a three-year study to find interventions that could reduce chronic diseases associated with poor nutrition and obesity in a Latino community.

- A study by Melissa Napolitano, PhD, an associate professor of prevention and community health, suggests that watching a video of an avatar work out on a virtual treadmill helped women in the real world lose weight.

- Can cell phones and Facebook help college students lose weight? Dr. Napolitano’s study examines healthy lifestyle information delivered via text and Facebook to give students the support they need to shed excess weight.