

History leading up to the 1998 publication of the NIH Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults.

The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), in collaboration with the NIDDK (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases), developed a plan to establish the **National Obesity Education Initiative (NOEI)** in 1991.

NIH Director Bernadine Healy, who was the first woman ever to lead the agency, conceptually supported the NOEI, although her primary focus at that time was launching what would ultimately become the longest-running and most comprehensive women's health study ever conducted, the Women's Health Initiative.

Overall support for the NOEI was initially quite strong as there were few objections to an initiative designed to reduce the prevalence of obesity as an independent risk factor for cardiovascular disease. Adequate funding for further development and a national launch of the NOEI was suddenly stalled, however, when NOEI administrators presented their evidence-based argument for insisting that any plan to reduce the prevalence of obesity must begin with a recognition of obesity as a complex, chronic disease, not a behavior choice that can in all cases be effectively managed with behavior modification alone.

However controversial this view of obesity may have been, NIH Director Harold Varmus fully supported the NOEI proposal to fund an NIH Consensus Development Conference on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults. Although the 1995 consensus conference did not conclude with a clear consensus, the members of the expert panel did agree that the NIH should be funding studies designed to shed light on the pathophysiology of obesity and its downstream physiological effects, conduct a comprehensive review of the literature, analyze the data, publish its own evidence-based position statement and, if the evidence is there, clinical guidelines for the identification, evaluation, and treatment of overweight and obesity in adults.

When the NOEI administrators returned from Geneva in June, 1997 after attending the WHO Expert Consultation conference entitled **Obesity: Preventing and managing the global epidemic**, they wasted no time adding the data presented at the WHO conference to the "treasure trove" of data the NOEI had already compiled.

After years of diligently conducting a thorough and meticulous review of the literature, including approximately 394 RCTs and observational studies, the NIH officially recognized obesity as a chronic disease in 1998 with the publication of the **Clinical Guidelines on the Identification, Evaluation, and Treatment of Overweight and Obesity in Adults**.
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