

## News

thewest.com.au

# Obese fail to see their problem

**CATHY O'LEARY**  
MEDICAL EDITOR

A staggering 85 per cent of West Australians who are clinically obese think their weight is normal or only slightly high, despite widespread campaigns warning about the dangers of being overweight, a new poll has revealed.

A survey of 800 people by Painted Dog Research for health insurer HBF and *The West Australian* also shows that most overweight people do not believe they are at greater risk of heart disease, diabetes or cancer.

Health experts said the findings were highly disturbing.

The results showed governments and the community had a long way to go to beat the battle of the bulge.

Based on the participants' weight and height to assess their body mass index, 60 per cent of those surveyed were found to be overweight or obese.

Of the 231 people found to be obese with a BMI of 30 or more, only one in seven considered they would be seen as very overweight.

Half said they were "a bit overweight" and a third said their weight was "about right".

Most obese people had a dismal knowledge about their risk of common diseases — more than 75 per cent



believed they were at low risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer.

Curtin University professor of health policy Mike Daube said the figures were a wake-up call that showed, although people understood the problem of obesity, many did not think it applied to them.

Professor Daube is deputy chairman of the Federal Government's Preventative Health Taskforce. Its

report is due to be released soon.

"Prevention tends to be about everyone except us and these figures are, quite frankly, pretty terrifying and lend support dramatically to the need for a major push on obesity, a condition which has a colossal impact on life expectancy and our health-care system," Professor Daube said.

"We don't seem to have cut through in the same way as we've done on tobacco.

"We seem to be where we were 30 years ago with tobacco when people sort of knew there was a problem but hadn't focused on what to do."

Cancer Council of WA director of

education and research Terry Slevin said the first challenge was to help people assess accurately where they sat on the healthy weight range.

"The second is to make crystal clear that being overweight, and in particular being obese, substantially increases risk for a number of common cancers," he said.

Heart Foundation chief executive officer Maurice Swanson said the results echoed a concern that new approaches were needed on obesity.

The Draw the Line campaign was aimed at making people understand small changes like reducing the size of meals could make a difference.