

Obese Aussies get big ambulances

By Phil Mercer
BBC News, Sydney

Australia's obesity crisis has forced health officials to revamp their fleet of ambulances to cope with a sharp rise in overweight patients.

Super-sized vehicles have been introduced and new air ambulances will be remodelled to carry heavier people.

Studies estimate that 67% of Australian men and over half of all women aged over 25 are overweight or obese.

So many Australians are now bulging at the waistline that ambulances are being equipped with heavy-duty stretchers.

These are capable of carrying patients weighing up to 220kg (34 st 9 lbs).

In the country's most populous state, New South Wales, officials have said that more super-sized ambulances may well be needed to cope with this health crisis.

Special vehicles with over-sized wheelchairs and a hydraulic tailgate were introduced a few years ago to transport larger people.

Their workload has doubled since 2004.

Obese toddlers

Dealing with the obese or overweight is becoming more common for medical teams and it can be an arduous experience.

In a recent case in Sydney it took 16 people several hours to take an injured man from his home to hospital.

He weighed about 400kg (63 st) and had broken his leg.

Emergency workers had to demolish part of his house to lift him out.

There are strong signs that Australia's obesity epidemic is getting worse.

A lack of exercise and a poor diet, including drinks loaded with sugar and high-fat snacks, are breeding a new generation of fat Australians.

Experts here are warning that by 2030 half of this country's children will be overweight or obese.

They have insisted that breast and colon cancer as well as diabetes and heart disease have strong links to obesity.

It is reported that some Australian hospitals are now treating obese patients who are as young as two years old.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/6494117.stm> Published: 2007/03/25 21:07:35 GMT