

Understanding Barriers to Weight-Loss Surgery in Latino Communities

A study aims to determine barriers to metabolic and bariatric surgery and enhance patient-provider communication.

February 28, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

A doctoral student at the University of Rhode Island (URI) is investigating why Latinos undergo metabolic and bariatric surgery (MBS) at lower rates than other groups while experiencing some of the highest rates of obesity, according to a [URI news release](#).

[Obesity](#) affects more than 40% of U.S. adults and nearly 46% of U.S. Latinos. Despite this, Latinos account for less than 15% of MBS patients compared with about 70% of non-Hispanic white individuals, according to the release.

Viviane Fornasaro-Donahue, a registered dietitian at the Miriam Hospital and a doctoral candidate in behavioral psychology at URI, will speak directly with Latinos throughout Providence to understand their perspectives on obesity and obesity treatment options.

Although the rate of [weight loss](#) surgery has increased over time, some groups are still less likely to discuss and follow through with the surgery.

Fornasaro-Donohue will explore potential [barriers to accessing treatment](#), sociocultural influences, [patient-doctor relationships](#) and more.

A low-risk, highly effective procedure, MBS involves altering the digestive system to help people lose weight and reduce their risk for serious health issues linked to obesity, such as [type 2 diabetes](#), [fatty liver disease](#), [hypertension](#) and [even cancer](#).

“Metabolic and bariatric surgeries aren’t just restrictive procedures—they have a hormonal impact that makes them the most effective long-term treatment for obesity, but they are

underutilized,” said Fornasaro-Donahue in the release.

What’s more, overweight and obesity have been linked to [at least 13 types of cancer](#), including breast, colon, liver and pancreatic cancers. Weight loss has been [shown to reduce cancer risk](#), and [a growing body of evidence](#) suggests that obesity medications may play a role in preventing malignancies and improving cancer prognosis.

In addition to exploring barriers to care, Fornasaro-Donahue aims to educate the community about available obesity treatment options and offer insights for providers on ways to improve their communication with patients regarding obesity and its treatment.

“This work will help providers improve communication about the surgeries’ benefits, empower patients and encourage informed decisions about obesity treatment,” she said. “By informing the public, providing supportive health care and access to resources, reducing stigma, and recognizing obesity as a chronic disease that requires effective treatment, we can help create better health outcomes for those affected.”

To learn more, click [#Weight Loss](#) or [#Obesity](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Time-Restricted Eating for Metabolic Syndrome](#),” “[New CDC Data Show Adult Obesity Prevalence Remains High](#)” and “[Weight-Loss Surgery Yields Long-Term Benefits for Type 2 Diabetes](#).”