Policy Responses to Tackle Obesity

What is the issue?

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- In recent times Obesity in India has become a major concern.
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- Policy measures needs to be taken in order to tackle the health challenges in India.
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What are the prevailing nutrition challenges in India?

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- In India 26 million children suffer from wasting (a low weight-for-height ratio), more than in any other country.
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- India has the second highest number of obese children in the world 15.3 million in China and 14.4 million in India, an additional 2.6 million children will be obese in India by 2025.
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- Rising obesity is putting pressure on already fragile health systems in India by posing a high risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and some cancers.
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- Research shows that Indians have higher levels of body fat and lower levels of lean muscle when compared to many other populations.
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- In India there is compelling evidence that heart disease and diabetes impose high burdens of catastrophic health expenditure, result in a loss of livelihoods and crush people into poverty.
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- With no insurance or personal savings, a heart disease diagnosis can compromise a person’s wealth as well as health.
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What measures has been taken by the government?

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- To address the health concerns union government announced that it would release an annual “state of nutrition” report.
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- The report would detail India’s level of stunting, malnutrition and feature best practices for States to scale up nutrition interventions.
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- India’s high-level commission and a UN General Assembly meeting on NCDs are giving new life to existing evidence-based yet largely unimplemented plans of action.
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- India looks ambitiously toward a universal health coverage system where everyone can access quality health services that are free of financial burden.
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What measures needs to be taken?

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- India’s policy responses should include agricultural systems that promote crop diversity as well as regulatory and fiscal measures (to decrease the availability, affordability and promotion of unhealthy foods, while making healthy foods more accessible).
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- For example, taking the lead from a directive by the Delhi High Court, India should ban the sale of junk food in and around schools.
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- Obesity management, prevention and treatment should be provided as essential health services.
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- India should link obesity and undernutrition and treat them as twinned challenges to be jointly addressed under the universal health coverage umbrella.
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- By tackling obesity through prevention and early care, financially debilitating NCDs can be avoided.
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- India will be in a better position to fulfil the promise of universal health coverage if it disrupts the cycle whereby poverty leads to NCDs and vice

versa.
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Source: The Hindu

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