

# Obesity and Diabetes Among South Bay Samoans: the Soifua Maloloina Project

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## ABSTRACT

Clinically, Samoans are characteristically obese which increases their risk for morbidity, disability and early mortality. Samoan communities in California (88% speak Samoan) are tightly linked, lead by tribal chiefs and traditional healers (Ma'tais, fofos, taulaseas). The Soifua Mololoina (Healthy Living) Project conducted a baseline survey of Samoans in the South Bay, with data obtained by trained Samoan researchers. Of the 305 Samoans surveyed, <9% had normal BMIs, 22% were overweight and >70% were obese with BMIs 30 to 71. Both non-diabetic Samoans (n=223; 52%M, 48%F, age 32.3+13.2y) and diabetic Samoans (n=69; 29%M, 71%F, age 54.0+12.4y) had mean BMIs in the obese range, 34.0+7.51 and 33.8+6.24, respectively. The diabetics compared to non-diabetics were significantly more likely to be older ( $p \leq 0.001$ ), female ( $p = 0.001$ ), and have additional diagnoses of hypercholesteremia ( $p = 0.009$ ) and hypertension ( $p \leq 0.001$ ). Non-diabetics compared to diabetics were more likely to smoke ( $p \leq 0.001$ ), drink ( $p \leq 0.001$ ), and consume a lower fruit and vegetable diet ( $p \leq 0.001$ ). Dietary patterns included frequent meal skipping, excessive portion sizes, frequent inclusion of coconut creme, and cooked green bananas, taro and potatoes as the predominant fruit and vegetables in the diet. Non-diabetic Samoans in this sample have multiple risks for early disease. Control over obesity is a priority in Samoan health care.