

as *pediatric social illness*, refers to the behavior, social, and educational problems that children face. Problems that can negatively impact a child's development include poverty, violence, aggression, noncompliance, school failure, and adjustment to parental separation and divorce. In addition, mental health issues cause challenges in childhood and adolescence. Recent concern has focused on groups of children who are at highest risk, such as children born prematurely or with very low birth weight (VLBW) or low birth weight (LBW), children attending child care centers, children who live in poverty or are homeless, children of immigrant families, and children with chronic medical and psychiatric illness and disabilities. In addition, these children and their families face multiple barriers to adequate health, dental, and psychiatric care. A perspective of several health problems facing children and the major challenges for pediatric nurses is discussed in the following sections.

## **Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes**

Childhood obesity, the most common nutritional problem among American children, is increasing in epidemic proportions ([Martin, Saunders, Shenkin, et al, 2014](#); [Giannini and Caprio, 2012](#)). Obesity in children and adolescents is defined as a body mass index (BMI) at or greater than the 95th percentile for youth of the same age and gender. Overweight is defined as a BMI at or above the 85th percentile and below the 95th percentile for children and teens of the same age and sex. Over 30% of America's children are overweight and 17% are obese ([Flores and Lesley, 2014](#)).

Advancements in entertainment and technology, such as television, computers, and video games, have contributed to the growing childhood obesity problem in the United States. In the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, screen times (TV, video, computer use) interact with genetic factors to influence BMI changes ([Graff, North, Monda, et al, 2011](#)). Lack of physical activity related to limited resources, unsafe environments, and inconvenient play and exercise facilities, combined with easy access to television and video games, increases the incidence of obesity among low-income, minority children. Overweight youth have increased risk for cardiometabolic changes (a cluster of cardiovascular factors that include hypertension, altered glucose