

Association for the Study of Obesity; position statement on weight stigma and discrimination

Background

The Association for the Study of Obesity (ASO) is dedicated to the understanding, prevention and treatment of obesity. In doing so, ASO aims to develop an understanding of obesity through the pursuit of excellence in research and education, the facilitation of contact between individuals and organisations, and the promotion of action to prevent and treat obesity. In achieving our aims, ASO recognises the importance of understanding, raising awareness and reducing weight stigma and discrimination.

Weight stigma and discrimination has become a topic of major research and applied interest. Over time, increased evidence has documented the: [widespread, pervasive nature of weight stigma](#); various sources and settings where weight stigma and discrimination is experienced including the [media](#), [education](#), [healthcare](#), [conferences](#), [exercise settings](#) and the [workplace](#); the [counterproductive effect of weight stigma](#); and the potential [impact on people and patients with overweight and obesity](#).

Evidence also demonstrates the detrimental [impact on prevention](#) and [treatment efforts](#). For instance, an abundance of research demonstrates that healthcare professionals stigmatise patients with obesity which can [reduce the quality of care patients receive](#), and in some cases, [do not provide the treatment or advice](#) that they should in consultation. Evidence also demonstrates that stigmatising experiences can lead to [healthcare avoidance](#).

Purpose

This statement has been developed in response to the wealth of evidence that demonstrates weight stigma and discrimination is pervasive. This includes many settings where the ASO members work such as research, education, practice, and consultancy. The ASO believe that: weight stigma and discrimination is unacceptable; that stigmatising attitudes and discriminatory behaviours are strongly discouraged in any of the activities that ASO members work; and remain committed to reducing negative attitudes towards people with overweight and obesity in all settings.

It is important that members uphold the society's values through all forms of professional work including the: dissemination of research findings in peer reviewed journals; at conferences, meetings or events; in practice, applied activities or consultancy; and in education and training. As such, ASO encourages members to:

- Use [person-first language](#): avoid using terms such as 'obesity' or 'overweight' as adjectives. Use phrasing such as 'adults with overweight and obesity' or 'adults with obesity' rather than 'overweight adults'. People first language is the accepted way to address people with physical or mental disabilities or chronic illnesses.
- Use non-stigmatising images: avoid using stigmatising or derogatory images of individuals who are overweight or with obesity. Please see the section 'further information and resources' below, for a range of links to image banks that ASO endorses the use of when using obesity-related imagery.
- Provide accurate information: avoid using weight-based stereotypes through inappropriate language or imagery; fat jokes/humour; or suggestions that a person's body weight implies negative assumptions about their character, intelligence, abilities, etc.
- Recognise the complexity of obesity: the [UK Government's Foresight Report \(2007\)](#) informs that there are over 100 factors that cause obesity, many of which are outside of a person's control. It is imperative that members recognise the array of causes and thus, avoid implicitly or explicitly blaming individuals, families and groups, or implying that a particular population group does not wish to manage their weight

The ASO statement on weight stigma and discrimination has been developed by Stuart W. Flint, Leeds Beckett University, and has been reviewed and agreed by the ASO Board of Trustees.

- Recognise that people have different views and opinions: avoid implying that all people with overweight and obesity have a desire to lose weight. Recognise that there is an array of weight loss methods that people *might* choose, and where weight loss is desired, that no one form of treatment is appropriate for all.
- Avoid combative language when referring to efforts to reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity. For instance, 'the war on obesity' and 'fight against obesity'.
- Where appropriate, take the opportunity to condemn weight stigma attitudes and discriminatory behaviour: weight stigma and discrimination is widespread and in many areas of society is perceived to be acceptable. Members are encouraged to speak out against weight stigma attitudes and discriminatory behaviours or practices.

It is expected that all ASO members uphold the values of the society, and thus, abide by the statement within their work.

Further information and resources

Further information that members may find useful is listed below.

Non-stigmatising imagery

ASO endorses the use of non-stigmatising imagery. Below are a range of image banks:

1. World Obesity Federation: <http://www.imagebank.worldobesity.org/>
2. Canadian Obesity Network: <http://www.obesitynetwork.ca/images-bank>
3. University of Connecticut's Rudd Center: <http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/media-gallery>
4. Obesity Action Coalition: <https://www.obesityaction.org/get-educated/public-resources/oac-image-gallery/>
5. European Association for the Study of Obesity: <http://easo.org/media-portal/obesity-image-bank/>
6. IFB Adiposity Diseases centre: <http://www.ifb-adipositas.de/en/news-press/photos>

What are your attitudes and behaviours related to obesity?

If you would like to find out what your attitudes and behaviours are towards obesity, you can complete a module provided by the University of Connecticut's Rudd Center:
<http://biastoolkit.uconnruddcenter.org/module1.html>

General information on weight stigma

University of Connecticut's Rudd Center:

<http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/weight-bias-stigma>

http://www.uconnruddcenter.org/files/Pdfs/Rudd_Policy_Brief_Weight_Bias.pdf

World Health Organisation EU Region:

<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/obesity/publications/2017/weight-bias-and-obesity-stigma-considerations-for-the-who-european-region-2017>

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Obesity Action Coalition:

<http://www.obesityaction.org/weight-bias-and-stigma>

Other policy statements on weight stigma

The Obesity Society (a range of position statements relating to weight bias):

<http://tosconnect.obesity.org/new-item/new-item4>