

Strictly embargoed until Tuesday, 03 March at 23:30 London time (GMT) / 18:30 New York time (EST)

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EASO joins major scientific organisations globally in a pledge to end obesity stigma

Coinciding with World Obesity Day, we have joined over 100 medical and scientific organisations across the world in pledging our support for a consensus statement that recognises unscientific public narratives of obesity as a major cause of weight stigma and calls for strong policies and legislation to prevent weight-based discrimination.

In a paper published today in *Nature Medicine*, <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41591-020-0803-x> a team of experts, led by Professor Francesco Rubino from King's College London, outlines a joint international consensus statement and a related **Pledge to Eradicate Weight Stigma**. The statement was developed through an international conference jointly organised by the World Obesity Federation, American Diabetes Association, American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists, American Association for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery, Diabetes UK, European Association for the Study of Obesity, International Federation for the Surgery of Obesity and Metabolic Disorders, Obesity Action Coalition, Obesity Canada, The Obesity Society.

"Weight stigma is a public health problem, undermines human and social rights and is a major stumbling block in the fight against the epidemic of obesity," said lead author Professor Francesco Rubino, Chair of Bariatric and Metabolic Surgery at King's College London.

"The objective of this initiative was to gather a broad group of experts and scientific organisations and, for the first time, speak with one voice to unambiguously condemn weight stigma and expose the misconceptions that contribute to weight bias," he said.

Previous evidence indicates that weight stigma can cause both physical and psychological harm, and that affected individuals are less likely to seek and receive adequate care. Often perceived as lazy, gluttonous, lacking will power and self-discipline, people with obesity are vulnerable to stigma and discrimination in the workplace, education, and in healthcare settings.

Main issues discussed in the statement include:

- Healthcare providers are a common source of weight stigma. The group calls on academic institutions and professional bodies to incorporate formal

teaching on the causes, mechanisms, and treatments of obesity, including stigma-free skills and practices.

- Social stigma is based on the typically unproven assumption that obesity derives primarily from a lack self-discipline and personal responsibility. Such portrayal is inconsistent with current scientific evidence demonstrating that body weight regulation is not entirely under volitional control, and that biological, genetic and environmental factors critically contribute to obesity.
- The media portrayal of obesity is influential; it plays an important role in shaping public attitudes and beliefs about people with obesity. The group calls on the media to produce fair, scientifically accurate, and non-stigmatising portrayals of obesity.
- Public health practices and messages that use stigmatising approaches to promote anti-obesity campaigns are objectively harmful. The group calls for public health authorities to bring such practices to an end and increase scientific rigour in obesity-related public policy.

EASO President Nathalie Farpour Lambert said "Obesity is a chronic relapsing disease and a gateway to other chronic diseases including cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. EASO is proud to join our sister societies globally in addressing obesity stigma, which has a negative impact on the lives of people living with obesity across the life course, and thus on public health. We are committed to working with clinicians and HCPs across Europe to improve education and training about obesity, a crucial step in reducing obesity stigma."

Individuals and organisations are invited to join and take the pledge at www.pledge2endobesitystigma.org #pledge2endobesitystigma #WorldObesityDay #ObesityDayEurope

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