

SUMMARY OF THE JOINT INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS STATEMENT FOR ENDING STIGMA OF OBESITY.



Prof Carel le Roux

**Obesity Complications Clinic,
St Vincent's Healthcare Group,
Dublin**

People with obesity commonly face a pervasive and resilient form of social stigma. They are often subject to discrimination in the workplace as well as in educational and healthcare settings. Research indicates that weight stigma can cause physical and psychological harm, and that affected individuals are less likely to receive adequate care. For these reasons, weight stigma damages health, undermines human and social rights, and is unacceptable in modern societies. To inform healthcare professionals, policymakers, and the public about this issue, a multidisciplinary group of international experts, including representatives of scientific organizations, reviewed available evidence on the causes and har-

ms of weight stigma and, using a modified Delphi process, developed a joint consensus statement with recommendations to eliminate weight bias.

In this initiative, they sought to inform healthcare professionals, policymakers, and the public about the prevalence, causes, and harmful consequences of weight stigma. The goal was to address the gap between popular, stigmatizing narratives around obesity and current scientific knowledge regarding mechanisms of body-weight regulation. A strength of the work was that they engaged a diverse group of panellists including academics from disparate disciplines, representatives of patient-advocacy organizations and patients. The broad endorsement of this statement and pledge by a diverse group of organizations, including scientific societies, patient-advocacy groups, academic and medical centres, scientific journals, and a parliamentary group provides an unprecedented opportunity for a concerted effort of all stakeholders to effectively tackle this important problem for medicine and society.

The experts concluded that the widespread narrative of obe-

sity in the media, in public health campaigns, in political discourse, and even in the scientific literature attributing the cause of obesity primarily to personal responsibility has an important role in the expression of societal weight stigma, and reinforces weightbased stereotypes. Weight stigma can mislead clinical decisions, and public health messages, and could promote unproductive allocation of limited clinical and research resources. Weight bias and stigma can result in discrimination, and can affect the health of afflicted individuals. Explaining the gap between scientific evidence, and a conventional narrative of obesity built around unproven assumptions and misconceptions might help to reduce weight bias, and its harmful effects. A concerted effort of all stakeholders is required to promote educational, regulatory, and legal initiatives designed to prevent weight stigma and discrimination. Academic institutions, professional organizations, media, public-health authorities, and governments should encourage education about weight stigma to facilitate a new public narrative about obesity, coherent with modern scientific knowledge.