



## PRESS RELEASE

***An army of advocates to address the difficulties people living with obesity face every day in Ireland.***

***EMBARGO: 2am July 7th 2022***

The Irish Coalition for People Living with Obesity (ICPO) announce their launch after almost a two-year delay with Covid-19 Restrictions.

ICPO is a patient led organisation which incorporated in August 2020. All their volunteers are people who live with the chronic relapsing disease of obesity, and they come together this **Thursday July 7<sup>th</sup> at the Louis Fitzgerald Hotel, Dublin 6pm-8pm**, to officially launch their organisation which has been building in strength over the last two years.

ICPO work closely with the HSE National Clinical Programme for Obesity and sit on a number of working groups associated with the programme as patient representatives and experts in lived experience. They were involved with the design, development and launch of the new Model of Care for Obesity (2021) and advocate for its implementation. This sets out how obesity care should be delivered in Ireland. Implementation of the model of care will improve access for 60% of the Irish population who are living with overweight and obesity to the right care, in the right place, at the right time, through provision of community weight management programmes, specialist medical management teams, and bariatric surgery services.

*“The importance of the individuals voice in promoting the awareness of obesity as a treatable chronic disease cannot be understated. The ICPO is a young organisation, but it has already made a major contribution to the discussions around obesity and influenced the funding decisions that have been made in recent months. The support that ICPO has given to the Obesity Programme over the last few years has been critical to the progress we have made – and I expect its impact is only going to grow.”*  
- Professor Donal O’Shea, HSE Clinical Lead for Obesity.

ICPO Executive Director Susie Birney has been one of the two patient representatives with the Association for the Studies of Obesity Ireland (ASOI) since 2016 and with the support of the ASOI, and others, has worked to build an army of advocates who address the stigma and bias that people living with obesity face every day.

Consultant Endocrinologist and outgoing Chair of the Association for the Study of Obesity in Ireland (ASOI), Dr Jean O'Connell, commented *"Obesity is a complex multi-factorial disease, so it is important that ASOI is an organisation with membership across a range of health professional disciplines. However, one of our greatest strengths has been representation of the voice of people living with obesity on the ASOI committee. Since the inception of ICPO, ASOI and ICPO have worked together on many advocacy projects. We look forward to continued collaboration with ICPO over the coming years, with a common goal of eliminating weight bias and stigma and helping to improve the lives of all people living with obesity. We are stronger together."*

Working with researchers, healthcare professionals and people living with obesity, ICPO aim to support, educate, and raise awareness that obesity is a complex chronic disease where the body's ability to regulate weight is disrupted. This means that outdated advice such as the simplistic 'You just have to Eat Less, Move More' mantra, is not effective for obesity treatment, and is not supported by scientific evidence.

Through campaigns and advocacy, they want to ensure obesity will be treated with dedicated, end to end care pathways including a range of treatment options, just as any other non-communicable relapsing disease is.

No stranger to the complexity of obesity and weight regain, Vice-Chair of the ICPO Board of Directors Teena Gates says *"Our patient organisation is making a difference. We're finally getting the message across that obesity is a disease, not a choice. Science is now accelerating to deal in that truth. For the first time in a decade, when I go to my GP, I am offered treatment instead of censure and criticism. The world is finally changing"*

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More information about ICPO can be found on their website [www.icpobesity.org](http://www.icpobesity.org)

Information for Support Groups and Meetings can be made through [icpobesity@gmail.com](mailto:icpobesity@gmail.com)