



14/07/20

The Irish Coalition for People living with Obesity (ICPO) is being formed as a non-profit organisation. We are a group of individuals who have been working towards creating this organisation and await confirmation of registration (CRO) while we continue advocating for people who live with overweight or obesity. Our aim is to address weight bias and stigma when we see it, and respectfully point out the consequences of it.

This complaint relates to the segment on RTÉ does Comic Relief Part 2, which featured the character “Rats” from Paths to Freedom.

This sketch contributes to the widespread stigma against people with obesity, which is a complex medical condition. Suggesting people who are “ancient and fat” should stay at home and that it is “a public service to suggest they stay at home until they lose a few pounds” although intended as comedy, are highly inappropriate and harmful suggestions which target a vulnerable group in society.

When people hold negative weight-related beliefs or attitudes towards people in larger bodies, this is known as weight bias. When expressed as social exclusion, stereotyping and discrimination, this is called weight stigma.

Both impact on mental and physical health and can lead people living with overweight or obesity to engage in behaviours that promote poor nutrition and a more sedentary lifestyle. It causes people to avoid appointments with health professionals and lead them to feel excluded from society. People who are stigmatised face social rejection and lower peer acceptance. The range of psychological consequences can be increased for depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, poor body image and even suicidal ideation.

Weight bias and stigma does not increase motivation or entice people to lose weight.

Weight is determined by many different factors including genetics, biology, the environment, economic factors, medications, culture, and psychology to name a few. Weight stigma has become a serious public health issue.

Our nation has been coping with the COVID-19 virus since early March and people have had to cope in different ways. Emotionally, financially, psychologically, physically it has turned lives upside down. Many did not leave their homes for long periods of time.

Many people with obesity who have self-isolated have already encountered stigma in their daily life. Some are already trying to cope with low mood and depression. Self-isolation measures made it difficult for many to access their usual support networks. Furthermore, many weight management programmes are postponed at present so people living with obesity cannot access the support they need.

Principle 3 in the Broadcasting Authority Ireland Code of Programme Standards states

Broadcasters must take due care to ensure that audiences are not exposed to harmful content

Principle 5 states “*the manner in which persons and groups in society are represented shall be appropriate and justifiable and shall not prejudice respect for human dignity*”. Furthermore “*Programme material shall not stigmatise, support or condone discrimination, or incite hatred against persons or groups in society*”

In fulfilment of Principle 5, broadcasters shall: Recognise that the use of terms, references and images could be considered offensive to persons and groups in society and associated colloquial terms of abuse aimed at any groups requires editorial justification for their inclusion in the programme.

In addition, we also note the BAI's own commitment to apply and monitor its Code of Programming Standards under the '**Connecting for Life strategy**', (CFL), Ireland's National strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020. The CFL is based on national and international evidence on suicide prevention strategies. It is designed to be a living document with actions adapted and updated to meet a changing society.

Some of our members have reported they have received replies to their personal complaints stating that no breach of regulation codes was made, as obesity is not in the list of categories of people who should not be discriminated against.

The BAI 'forward' to their Code of Programme Standards acknowledges that their list of requirements is 'not exhaustive'. Therefore, because obesity is not specifically listed as a vulnerable group, it does not follow that it should be excluded altogether. Given the response from RTÉ which has used the exclusion of the word obesity as a shield, the time has clearly arrived for obesity to be added to the list.

Overweight and obesity combined currently impacts 60% of our adult population.

It is worth noting in April 2015, the decision of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) in *Kaltoft* (Case C-354/13), on whether obesity discrimination can amount to disability discrimination, did recognise that in some cases differential treatment on the basis of obesity can amount to disability discrimination. CJEU agrees that obesity may hinder the full and effective participation of some persons in professional life on a long-term basis and in those cases, obesity discrimination can fall within the EU concept of 'disability discrimination'.

One of RTÉ's responses states that while 1.4 million viewers tuned into the show, only a handful of people complained, "that overwhelmingly viewers saw it for what it was – comedy; they did not regard it as gratuitous or deeply offensive". There was a time when RTÉ would not have received many complaints about gender- and race-based discrimination. Does RTÉ only consider racist and sexist 'comedy' unacceptable now because there would be too many complaints if included in a broadcast today? Is RTÉ only prepared to take a position against discrimination if enough people complain about it?

We would respectfully suggest that rather than dismiss our complaint, the national broadcaster of Ireland could use this as an opportunity to learn about weight stigma and consider what is the right thing to do, rather than wait until sufficient numbers of people tell you what you should do. Please read the attached **International Joint Consensus Statement**, published in February 2020, so that you will hopefully understand why the show does indeed cause "undue offence".

Weight stigma has a direct harmful effect on this vulnerable group, one of the consequences being that they may not have the courage to write letters of complaints themselves in fear of being further stigmatised.

We at ICPO represent those who cannot use their own voice to complain.

We await your response on this matter. The following people and organisations support this complaint.

Association of Studies of Obesity Ireland (ASOI)

European Association of Studies of Obesity (EASO)

European Coalition for People Living with Obesity (ECPO)

Obesity Action Coalition, America

PCOS Vitality, NI

St Vincent's Healthcare Group, Dublin

Weight Management Patient Support Group, Galway Bariatric Service

Weight Management Patient Support Group, St. Columcille's Hospital, Dublin

@obsmuk (a platform to fight obesity and advocate for people with obesity UK)

Abd Tahrani, Senior Lecturer in Obesity Medicine, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation trust

Amanda Villiers-Tuthill BSc Human Nutrition & Dietetics. MSc Research in Psych, WMS St Columcilles

Anita Murray, HSE

Ben Whelan, ICPO Board Member

Bernadette Keenan, ICPO Committee

Caroline Donovan, RD, ASOI

Cathy O'Sullivan, Psychologist in Clinical Training

Cecilia Prieto MSc Health Inequalities &PP, Population Health Sciences UoE

Claire Kearney MSC, RNP, RN, RM.CNM 2, Weight Management Service, St. Columcilles Hospital

Colin Dunlevy, Phd, MISCP. Senior Physiotherapist, Weight Management Service, St. Columcilles Hospital

Diane Charleton, ICPO Committee

Dr. Andrew E. Hogan Assist. Prof & Principal Investigator, Instit for Human Health Maynooth University

Dr. Cathy Breen, RD in Diabetes / Weight Management, St Columcilles, ASOI

Dr. Colin Davenport, Consultant Endocrinologist, Galway University Hospitals

Dr. Finian Fallon CPsychol MIACP, St. Vincents Healthcare Group

Dr. Grace O'Malley RCSI, Childrens Health Ireland at Temple street, ASOI, EASO Secretariat

Dr. Grainne O'Donoghue PhD, MSc, BSc. Lecturer, School of Public Health, PT & Sports Science UCD

Dr. Jean O'Connell, Consultant Endocrinologist, ASOI Chair

Dr. Karl Neff, Consultant Endocrinologist St Vincents Healthcare Group

Dr. Mary A T Flynn RD, ASOI

Dr. Tracey Harrington, Assistant Professor School of Nursing, Psychotherapy and Community Health

Dr. Yitka Graham, Associate Professor of Health Services Research, University of Sunderland.

Emer O'Malley, Senior Physiotherapist, WMS, St. Columcilles Hospital TCD & UCD Practice Tutor

Enda Mulvany Medtronic

Eoin O'Connell, ICPO Committee

Fiona Quigley, PhD Researcher Ulster University

Julianne Reinheimer CRPD, ID, CDPL LLM Graduated

Karen Gaynor, National Obesity Clinical Programme, ASOI

Linda Smyth, ICPO Board Member

Louise Tully BSc, MSc, Rnutr, ASOI

Marita Hennessy, Postdoctoral Researcher, College of Medicine and Health, University College Cork

Mary Frances White, ICPO Committee

Mary O'Kane, Honorary Consultant Dietitian, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust.

Maura Murphy, ASOI, ICPO Committee

Maureen Ann Busby Dip Nutrition Practitioner, BSc, MSc, MBPSS
Michelle "Shelly" Vicari, Obesity Action Coalition National Board, Chair
Niamh Arthurs BSc, MSc, RD, ASOI
Nicola Kavanagh, ICPO Committee
Oonagh Lyons PhD Researcher Ulster University, ASOI
Patty Nece-Patient Advocate OAC America
Paul Chesworth- Patient Advocate OEN UK
Prof. Carel le Roux, FRCP, PhD, Obesity Physician, St Vincent's University Hospital
Prof. Donal O'Shea, HSE Obesity Clinical Lead
Prof. Francis Finucane MSc MD FRCPI Consultant Endocrinologist, Galway University Hospitals
Prof. Mike Gibeny BAgSc, MAgSc, Phd UCD
Sanjeev Kumar MD
Sheree Bryant, EASO Secretariat
Siobhan Foy, HSE
Solveig Sigurdardóttir-ECPO President
Susie Birney, ASOI, ICPO Committee, ECPO Secretary
Tara Kelly, Specialist Dietician, Honorary Clinical Fellow, NUI Galway
Ted Kyle, RPh, MBA ConscienHealth
Teena Gates, ECPO Board member, ICPO Board Member
Vicki Mooney, ECPO Executive Director, ICPO Board Member
Ximena Ramos Salas, PhD, Director of Research & Policy, Obesity Canada
Zaher Toumi, Bariatric and Upper Gastrointestinal Surgeon, University Hospital of North Durham, UK

Adam Heslin	Barbara Knowles	Daniel Bell	Elizabeth O'Rourke
Aggie Sobanska	Barbara Szecsenyi	Daniel Delaney	Elizabeth Quinn
Aidan Heslin	Barry Hogan	Daniel Dolan	Eugene Redmond
Alan Byrne	Bernadette Smith	Daniel Geoghegan	Fidelma Maher
Alan Caulwell	Bernie Mc Kenna	Daniel Smyth	Fiona Farragher
Alan O'Shea	Bláithín Ní Ghabhainn	Danielle Pritchard	Fiona Robinson
Alex Keenan	Breeda O' Driscoll	Danielle Sheehan	Fionn Smyth
Alice Smyth	Breege McManus	David Cullen	Fionnuala Fildes
Amanda Kennedy	Brian Hassett	David Gorman	Fran Doherty
Amanda Smyth	Carine Birney	David Mooney	Frances Buggy
Andrea Nicholas	Carmel Gorman	Dawn O'Brien	Frances Cepeda
Andrea Wildi	Carmel Lynch	Dee Neeson	Frances Murphy
Andrew McCormack	Carmel Rowe	Deirdre Fox	Frances O'Doherty
Andrew Robinson	Caroline Grogan	Deirdre Mc Donnell	Frank Heslin
Angela Roe	Catherine O Sullivan	Derek Wall	Frank Keenan
Anita Kelly	Catherine Sheehan	Donie O Sullivan	Ger Byrne Coone
Ann O'Neill	Chris Furlong	Eamonn Birney	Geraldine Bell
Anna Carroll Browne	Christina Szecsenyi	Edward Keane	Geraldine Delaney
AnnMarie Leonard	Ciara de Burca	Edwina Treacy	Gerry Barrett
Anthony Gorman	Ciaran Barry	Eileen Egan	Gillian Gorman
Anthony Woods	Clare Crone	Eileen O Leary	Heather Thompson
Aoife Connolly	Colin Bell	Éiremhón O Leary	Hughie Donnelly
Aoife Vickers	Conchita Murphy	Elaine Callaghan	Jack Heade
Aoife Whelan	Dan Smyth	Eleanor Petrie	Jack Miller

Jacqui Keenan	Liam Miller	Michelle Smith	Samantha Phillips
James Callaghan	Liam O'Donohoe	Michelle Walshe	Sarah Hart
James Cushnan	Lily Bowden	Monica McKenna	Sarah Jane Murphy
James Smith	Linda (@ichein1949)	Neil McCabe	Saundra Bailey
Jamie Hammond	Lisa Heslin	Niall Keenan	Seamus Mc Kenna
Jane Hogan	Lisa Murphy	Niamh Murphy	Sean Delaney
Janet Lambert	Liz Crone	Nigel Hammond	Sean Heslin
Jill Cullen	Lorna Lennon	Noel Hart	Sean Smith
Jim Dormey	Lorraine Cotter	Noel Kennedy	Sean Spillane
Joanne Harding	Lorraine Gorman	Noleen McCormack	Sheena Heslin
Joanne Sharpe	Louise Borre	Nora O'Hare	Sheila Connor
Joe Carolan	Lynn Bride	Odeile Bolger	Sheila Winters
Joe Hogan	Lynn Mather	Oisin Kennedy	Siobhán Smyth
Joe White	Maeve O'Sullivan	Oliver Robinson	Stacey Mc Elligiott
Joey Germaine	Mairead Max	Orla O'Shea	Stephen Birney
John Connolly	Margaret Healy	Orla Smith	Stephen Gavin
John Delaney	Margaret Miller	Pamela Bell	Stephen Miller
John Gaynor	Margaret Shortall	Pamela Mawby	Susanne Reel
John Joyce	Maria Dolores Espinola	Paschal Crone	Suzanne Shiels
John Kane	Maria Roe Connolly	Pat Culkin	Tara Keenan
John Vickers	Marian Carolan	Pat Smyth	Tara Manning
Joseph Delaney	Marie Heslin	Patricia Barry	Tara Smyth
Joseph O Leary	Marjorie Fox	Patricia Hendrick	Tasha Geoghegan
Joshua Crone	Martin Walsh	Patrick Gorman	Terri Bjornson
Josie McGrath	Martina Curran	Paul Donnelly	Timo Barry
Julie Hogan	Mary Corry	Paul Gorman	Tom Bird
Karen Heade	Mary Dillon	Paul Masterson	Tom Cullen
Karen Williams	Mary Fox	Pauline Dolan	Tom Kavanagh
Kathleen Leonard	Mary Mealy	Peter Cullen	Troy Spillane
Kathleen Levick	Mary Redmond	Peter Mc Kenna	Turlough Szecsenyi
Kay Smyth	Mary Stokes	Peter Smyth	Vib Mistry
Kevin Heade	Maryrose Whelan	Richie Kelly	Vincent Lang
Laura Hennessy	Matt Love	Rishi Caleyachetty	William Mates
Laurance Hoey	Michael Doyle	Rita Delaney	William Robinson
Lauren Heade	Michael Fox	Robert Donnelly	William Whelan
Lawrence Murphy	Michael Mc Carty	Robert Keogh	Yvonne Byrne
Leanne Smith	Michael McGovern	Roly Carson	Yvonne Crone
Liam Barry Jr	Michael Miller	Ronnie O'Grady	
Liam Barry Sr	Michelle Barrett	Ruth Doyle	
Liam Campion	Michelle Reynolds	Ruth Shanu	