



## **Press Release for World Obesity Day 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

Thursday March the 4<sup>th</sup> 2021 marks World Obesity Day. This is a day dedicated to increasing awareness of the root causes of obesity and improving understanding of the actions required to address them. It is a day for encouraging advocacy in order to address the common perceptions in society that drive unfair weight bias and stigma and make it even more difficult for individuals and families affected by obesity to receive proper clinical care and access to treatment. This is a day that encourages collaboration across stakeholders, policy makers, healthcare professionals, individuals affected by obesity and society as a whole. By working together, knowledge and experiences can be shared to drive policy improvements and stipulate change that ultimately prioritise obesity as a health issue and enable more supportive environments and better care to be developed.

Following marked success of ECOICO2020 which was a European and international 4-day event co-hosted by the Association for the Study of Obesity on the Island of Ireland (ASOI) in September 2020, the ASOI along with the Irish Coalition for People Living with Obesity (ICPO) are continuing to work together and call for further implementation of the Department of Health national Obesity Policy and Action Plan. ASOI and ICPO will mark World Obesity Day on Thursday March 4<sup>th</sup> by hosting an online event. With the theme “Addressing Obesity Together” this collaboration of healthcare professionals, researchers and people living with this chronic relapsing disease, is an opportunity for everyone to join and learn about working together in Ireland towards achieving a more informed and just society which will enable happier, healthier and longer lives for everybody.

*"Our World Obesity Day Ireland event is seeing healthcare professionals, multi-disciplinary weight management services, researchers, medical and other allied health professional students, and people living with obesity themselves coming together to raise awareness of how important 'Addressing Obesity Together' really is. Sharing the patient experience is done so in the hope to reduce stigma and also educate that obesity is a disease which needs ongoing treatment and care".*

states Bernadette Keenan of ICPO

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Covid-19 has amplified stigmatising and controversial thoughts on obesity which further drives the common but incorrect public narrative of “eat less and move more” as the main way to treat obesity. This public shaming and blaming heightened by the use of inappropriate imagery, dramatic headlines and inaccurate statements is extremely distressing and damaging to those affected by obesity and reduces the likelihood of people receiving the care and treatment needed. It is a vicious cycle which needs to end.

*“People living with obesity have an increased risk of severe illness with COVID-19. In addition, the pandemic restrictions have contributed to significant mental health challenges for people with obesity, who were already experiencing high levels of social exclusion and isolation prior to COVID-19. These combined physical and psychological vulnerabilities have highlighted the need for a proactive approach to treatment of obesity in Ireland. We need to stop being influenced by food and diet industry vested interests, and start practicing evidence-based medicine, as we do for other chronic diseases. We need to see cross-governmental support and funding for full implementation of the newly launched Model of Care for Obesity Management in Ireland. This includes equal and timely access to accredited multi-disciplinary community and bariatric surgery centres, and reimbursement for medications proven to support weight loss interventions”.*

according to Dr Jean O’Connell, Chair of ASOI

Almost a quarter (24%) of people in Ireland live with obesity; this is your relative, colleague or friend who is affected. According to the recent Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI) report published in October 2020, 1 in 5 primary school aged children surveyed in Ireland are living with overweight or obesity. Although this report found that overall rates of childhood obesity in Ireland are plateauing, the prevalence is significantly greater in DEIS schools. This highlights the widening gradient between social classes and the necessity to look at current initiatives and supports collaborative action from healthcare professionals (HCPs), policy makers and other key stakeholders who might impact obesity prevention, treatment and care in Ireland.

Although we are making some progress in Ireland there is still a lot more to do. Please register for the ICPO and ASOI World Obesity Day online event [here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/J9NKV5Q](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/J9NKV5Q)

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## **Notes for Media**

For World Obesity Day 4<sup>th</sup> March 2021:

We are supporting people living with obesity and overweight to advocate for their right to respectful and evidence-based care and support.

We are helping healthcare practitioners to learn more about their role in treating obesity with evidence-based non-stigmatising, person-centred approaches.

We are pushing for further research, health systems monitoring, and surveillance that are needed to address this disease.

World Obesity Day will include global recognition as well as regional and national campaigns and local activities and events. Organisations and individuals from across the world will be participating.

The ASOI members represent health professionals, scientists and researchers and patient representatives working together to address the many impacts obesity has on the lives of children, teenagers and adults living in Ireland.

*“The combined effort of the ASOI membership is our strength, as this results in the multifactorial approaches needed. The involvement of people living with obesity provides critical input and ensures all ASOI activities empower and support those bearing the burden of the disease”*

according to Dr Jean O’Connell, Chair of ASOI

For guidance on non-stigmatising reporting about obesity in the media, [please click here](#). We especially ask that media reports on obesity refrain from using stigmatising imagery. A free image bank is also [available here](#).

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For more information in relation to this or any of the specific aspects of obesity below, contact the ASOI administrator: [info@asoi.info](mailto:info@asoi.info)

- Treatment in adults – Dr Jean O’Connell
- Nutrition assessment and treatment - Dr Cathy Breen
- Childhood and adolescence – Dr Grace O’Malley
- Population health/food regulation – Dr Mary Flynn
- Patient advocacy/weight stigma - Ms Susie Birney, Ms Maura Murphy, Ms Bernadette Keenan

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