



Press Release for World Obesity Day 4th March 2022

Friday 4th March 2022 is World Obesity Day 2022. The Association for the Study of Obesity on the Island of Ireland (ASOI) and the Irish Coalition for People Living with Obesity (ICPO) are again collaborating efforts to raise awareness and reduce stigma.

The theme of World Obesity Day (WOD) 2022 is '*Everybody Needs to Act*'. This global campaign connects individuals from healthcare, politics, the media and public-patient communities worldwide in collaborative efforts to increase awareness about obesity. Action is needed at local, regional, national and international levels. The ASOI and ICPO are asking the media, policymakers, health professionals and the general public to get involved, get engaged and be informed.

Most people will know someone who is affected by obesity. Yet many people do not realise the detrimental implications of blaming, shaming or having negative attitudes towards those with obesity. Obesity and its complications can be very serious and lead to devastating physiological and psychological effects. These include low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, higher risk of eating disorders, poorer metabolic health and functional problems with mobility and movement. Obesity stigma, bias and discrimination is pervasive in society and in healthcare. It can prevent individuals and families from receiving the essential care and support that they need and are entitled to.

"After receiving a direct experience of stigma I wasn't going to return for another crucial appointment as I felt shamed by my consultant. Instead, I wrote a letter addressing the stigmatising behaviour and received an apology. Together we can address stigma and improve the lives of those living with obesity."

states Catherine O'Sullivan of ICPO

Evidence from the most recent National Child Measurement Programme in England indicates that the prevalence of overweight, obesity and severe obesity has increased since 2020 among children in primary school¹. There is a widening social gradient in obesity prevalence between children living in the least deprived areas compared to children living in the most deprived areas over the last two years³. Social deprivation is also a known risk factor for obesity among children in Ireland. Stark increases in the cost of living coupled with limited access to healthcare during and after the Covid-19 pandemic and the HSE cyber-attack mean that the health of individuals and families are now at greater risk.

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According to Dr. Jean O'Connell, Endocrinologist and ASOI Chair: *“The last two years have been difficult for everyone, but the Covid-19 pandemic has been particularly challenging for children, adolescents and adults living with obesity. These challenges include increased social isolation, negative impacts on sleep, activity and other health behaviours, and high levels of stress and anxiety, including understandable concerns about the increased risk from Covid-19 illness. Overall, the substantial negative effects on physical and mental health over the last 2 years have disproportionately affected people with obesity.”*

WOD in 2021 marked a significant turning point in the planning of health care services for obesity in Ireland. The Health Service Executive (HSE) in partnership with the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland launched the *Model of Care for the Management of Overweight and Obesity*, developed by the Obesity National Clinical Programme. This model takes a population health approach to managing obesity which acknowledges genetics, environment and socioeconomic status as interconnected determinants of obesity. It acknowledges obesity as a chronic disease requiring end-to-end services to support prevention and treatment.

Karen Gaynor, Dietetic Lead for HSE Health and Wellbeing and the Obesity National Clinical Programme says *“Great progress has been made in the HSE since the launch of the Model of Care. Recruitment of dietitians to deliver community-based weight management services for adults has commenced. We are also developing a weight management programme for children and young people in two community areas. Care pathways for obesity have been prioritised in the Department of Health Waiting List Action Plan. This means funding will be allocated in 2022 to develop specialist services including bariatric surgery for those with complex obesity- providing the right care in the right place at the right time.”*

Since its launch on WOD last year, the Sláintecare Childhood Obesity Project Team has provided free online, accredited training to over 1100 health professionals and health professional students in Ireland. This timely project is a collaboration between RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences, The Child and Adolescent Obesity Service in Children's Health Ireland at Temple Street, the ASOI and the ICPO. Through the delivery of free high-quality training (available at: www.childhoodobesity.ie) the project aims to empower health professionals to develop their knowledge and improve access to care for children and adolescents with obesity. By improving training, the project supports healthcare professionals in providing children and families with better quality care.

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Dr. Grace O'Malley, Sláintecare Childhood Obesity Project Lead states:

“Our training programme has been really well received to date and is testament to the commitment of health professionals in Ireland in addressing child and adolescent obesity. The deliverables of the Sláintecare-funded project were exceeded, and we are delighted that the Department of Health will continue to support development of the training for 2022. We must ensure that all health professionals are trained to meet the healthcare demands of the 21st century.”

Another significant development in obesity care in Ireland in 2021 was the successful application by the ASOI, in conjunction with the Obesity National Clinical Programme, to become the European pilot site for the adaptation of the Canadian Adult Obesity Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPGs) for use in Irish settings. This project involves wider stakeholder engagement in Ireland with over 60 specialists across clinical practice, academia and people with lived experience of the disease collaborating to adapt the guidelines. Adapting the CPGs will help to ensure high quality, standardised and non-stigmatising care standards to support services within the new model of care.

Dr. Cathy Breen, ASOI Co-ordinator for the CPG adaptation project told us *“ASOI were delighted to win the bid. It’s an exciting time for obesity care in Ireland with the launch of the Model of Care - and this project presents a huge opportunity to embed high quality guidelines in clinical care delivery. We were very keen to adapt the Obesity Canada CPGs because they really speak our language – they focus on reducing obesity stigma and promote a best-practice, evidenced based approach to obesity assessment, diagnosis, and treatment. The engagement from the writing teams working on the adaptation has been wonderful – we have people from a wide range of disciplines from all over Ireland with an interest in this area generously giving their time to make sure the CPGs fit in the Irish healthcare system. We’re excited for Ireland to lead this work in Europe.”*

The ASOI in collaboration with ICPO will continue to contribute to major progress on obesity in Ireland throughout 2022 and through preparations for hosting the 2023 European Congress on Obesity (ECO) at the Convention Centre in Dublin. ECO 2023 will draw world experts together for a four-day meeting in Dublin that explores the science, prevention and treatment of obesity from all angles including the vital voice and perspective from people living with obesity.

For WOD 2022, the ASOI and ICPO encourage everybody to support the campaign by sharing short promotions of videos on social media and by contributing and sharing short statements on how we all individually or as a group ACT for obesity. For further information, please see:

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The Association for the Study of Obesity on the Island of Ireland (ASOI): <http://www.asoi.info/>

The Irish Coalition for People Living with Obesity (ICPO): <https://icpobesity.org/>

Notes for Media

For World Obesity Day 4th March 2022:

The Irish Coalition for People Living with Obesity (ICPO) recently launched an image bank along with The European Coalition for People living with Obesity (ECPO) to help reduce stigma and change unfair, biased and judgemental attitudes towards individuals and families affected by obesity. These professional collections of images are free for the media to use and are supported by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Please ACT for obesity by using respectful non-stigmatising imagery available at: <https://icpobesity.org/#gallery>

And: <https://ecpomediamedia.org/image-bank/>

Please ACT for obesity by using respectful non-stigmatising language.

Guidance is available at: https://woday.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/220215-Weight-Bias-Person-First-Language_Brief.pdf

As the ASOI:

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.

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“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.

-Ends-

References:

1. Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (2022). National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) data for the 2020 to 2021 academic year by local authority. Available at: [NCMP data for the 2020 to 2021 academic year by upper tier local authority: short statistical commentary - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ncmp-data-for-the-2020-to-2021-academic-year-by-upper-tier-local-authority-short-statistical-commentary) (www.gov.uk)