

## Obesity and Health at Every Size® - Obesity Collective Statement

September 2020

The Obesity Collective advocates for a whole of society approach to obesity including prevention and evidence-based treatment/care options for those living with obesity that want help. Obesity is one of our most prominent, challenging and preventable national health challenges. The evidence is clear that obesity increases risks of disease, disability and inequity on a population level. Sadly, this has become particularly apparent during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Obesity is also more than a risk to our physical health. The very word obesity is loaded with stigma, shame and blame, which harms people's mental health, promotes unhealthy behaviours and drives discrimination in society.

The Obesity Collective aims to reduce the negative impacts of obesity in Australia by taking a whole of society approach that considers the social, biological, environmental and cultural drivers of health and health inequalities. All of society needs to share responsibility for people's health and wellbeing given our environment and food systems have evolved to contribute to obesity. We need to have healthy work, school and community environments so that it is easier for everyone (not just people with obesity) to be healthy and well. We need ready access to quality information about obesity, comprehensive prevention plans and a range of evidence informed support, treatment and medical care options for all who seek them.

Health at Every Size® is a weight inclusive and weight-neutral approach predominantly provided through private consultations with healthcare professionals or commercial programs. It is one among many approaches available to people wishing to improve their health. The Obesity Collective shares most of the core principles of Health at Every Size®. We agree that, at all body sizes, it is possible and positive for people to take steps to improve their health and that equitable access to health care should be available to people of all body sizes. We agree that there is an urgent need to reduce weight bias and stigma in society to prevent harm to physical health, mental health and wellbeing. We agree that BMI alone is not enough to indicate a person's overall health status. Although there can be many physical and mental health benefits to weight loss for people living with obesity, we agree that weight loss is difficult (biology makes it so) and should not be just an end in itself.

The Obesity Collective differs from Health at Every Size® in that we accept the evidence that obesity is a health and societal issue. We know that no one approach has all the answers, nor is suitable for everyone. We know from people living with obesity that they wish medical support to be a choice. We are concerned that criticizing the use of other medical support options risks increasing stigma and adding to public confusion. Hence, we advocate for respecting the diversity that exists in people's wishes for support in managing their health and weight. The Obesity Collective has created a high level [code of conduct](#) to emphasise these points.

Some feel that the word obesity should not be used because of the shame/blame associated with it. Our position is that obesity is a medical term that can be used respectfully. It is a description of a condition, not a label or personal judgement. As we have seen with other stigmatised health challenges in the past (e.g. cancer, depression, and diabetes), avoiding a word is confusing and not necessarily helpful in reducing stereotypes. Talking around the topic or using other words to describe high levels of adiposity that impact health will only create new words that are loaded with stigma and blame. We are working to raise awareness and reduce stigma around obesity, primarily as a condition, but also as a word.