

## **Weight Bias Task Force Issues Policy Statement**

In November of 2004, NAASO created a Task Force on Weight Bias to articulate NAASO's position on weight discrimination and to identify strategies for implementing that position. One of the first accomplishments of this Task Force has been the development of a policy statement on weight bias. The following statement was approved by NAASO Council on May 1, 2005.

### **NAASO, The Obesity Society Policy Statement Weight Bias Task Force**

**ABSTRACT.** There is accumulating evidence of clear and consistent bias, stigmatization, and in some cases discrimination, against obese individuals. NAASO's commitment to advocacy includes opposition to weight bias and discrimination. As such, NAASO has created a Weight Bias Task Force. The mission of the task force is to combat weight bias and discrimination through scientific research, training, and advocacy.

#### **BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Puhl and Brownell (2001) reviewed the scientific literature and found evidence of clear and consistent stigmatization of obese individuals in three domains of living: employment, education, and health care. Recent studies have also documented automatic negative associations with obese people among health professionals (Schwartz et al., 2003; Teachman & Brownell, 2001), exercise science students (Chambliss, Finley & Blair, 2004) and among obese individuals themselves (Wang, Brownell, & Wadden, 2004).

The impact of weight bias on overweight children and adolescents deserves special attention. There is growing evidence that overweight children experience adverse social, educational, and psychological consequences as a result of weight bias (Latner & Schwartz, in press; Neumark-Sztainer et al, in press). Further research on the presence and impact of weight bias against children is needed to guide interventions.

While negative attitudes toward obese individuals are well documented, evidence of clear and systematic discrimination is limited. There is correlational evidence of the relationship between increased body weight and inequities in wages and use of preventive health care. There is also anecdotal evidence of discrimination in employment, education, health care, insurance, professional services, public facilities, public accommodations, and social interactions.

The negative consequences of bias and discrimination for obese individuals can be severe. The stigma of obesity results in tremendous suffering and waste of human potential. There is no place for bias and discrimination in a just, compassionate society.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Weight bias is an issue that must be addressed on multiple levels, including the individual, family, community, and larger society. Remedies for the problems of weight bias will require expertise from a range of academic disciplines, including medicine, law, psychology, and education.

NAASO's Anti-Weight Discrimination Task Force is committed to:

- Setting a research agenda to clearly and systematically describe, understand the mechanisms of, and reduce weight bias and discrimination.
- Educating the public about issues related to body size and weight.
- Providing accurate information about obesity to the media.

Increasing awareness of biased portrayals of larger people in the media.  
Promoting the health care rights of larger people.

NAASO opposes weight discrimination and stigma unequivocally. As a scientific organization, we have an obligation to stand together with larger people to fight weight bias in a society that poorly understands this condition called "obesity."

## References

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