

The Policy Impact of Weight Stigma

Obesity Health Alliance



Context

- 1991 – First Government target for reducing obesity prevalence
- 1991-2021 – 14 Government obesity strategies, 689 policy recommendations
- Consistent focus on personal responsibility
- 2020 strategy first movement towards a structural approach to obesity

“The assumption that our body weight is totally under our voluntary control goes against scientific evidence and results in public health policies that focus entirely on personal responsibility, incorrect messaging in the media and undermines access to evidence-based treatments that would improve the health of people living with obesity. Ending weight stigma is paramount, not only from a human rights and social justice standpoint but to advance the prevention and treatment of obesity.”

- Professor Rachel Batterham,
Professor of Obesity, Diabetes & Endocrinology, University College London

Attitudes & Media

- Growing policy/academic consensus of a structural & inequality lens
- Stigma is persistent in public attitudes, amongst policymakers and in the media
- Media role in perpetuating stigma

Impact on Policy

- Misinformation & stigma encourage government policies based on personal responsibility
- Structural approaches discarded
- Underpins the cycle of ineffective government approaches to obesity

Government should tell obese to eat less, says ex-minister Lord Robathan

🕒 21 October



A Conservative ex-minister has urged the government to "tell people they must not eat so much" in an effort to stop them getting "grossly overweight".

Lord Robathan said the current anti-obesity strategy for England was not working and there had to be more emphasis on personal responsibility.

It should not be "socially acceptable" to be very overweight, he added.

Impact on People

- Impact on physical & mental health
- Employment discrimination & incomes
- Education & bullying
- Healthcare settings & access to care

Signs of Change

- Growing acceptance that responsibility for obesity does not solely rest with individuals
- Government moving away from “eat less move more”, taking-up more structural approaches to obesity

Necessary Action

- Government-led culture change
- Training and resources in healthcare settings
- Guidance about employment discrimination
- Media responsibility
- Further research