

Experts weigh the heavy impact words have when creating policies for better health

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Are words weighing down America's ability to improve its health? According to a group of weight and health experts assembled by the Strategies to Overcome and Prevent (STOP) Obesity Alliance, the answer is yes. There is a need for media and policymakers to more responsibly address weight-related health issues, the experts said, and remove the verbal barriers that are getting in the way of a more informed, responsible conversation.

"With [chronic diseases](#) plaguing our health and driving up costs, we can no longer afford to overlook how weight relates to health," said Alliance Director Christine Ferguson, J.D. "Improving how we talk about weight and health in media and policy is step one to how we will improve our health."

The STOP Obesity Alliance, in conjunction with the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA), developed the new weight and health discussion guidelines for policymakers, released today during a national webinar. The new guidelines are designed to help policymakers more responsibly address weight-related [health issues](#).

The recommendations emphasize that despite the pervasiveness of inaccurate depictions of weight-related issues in the media and popular culture, policymakers need to understand that both individual choices and societal factors impact weight status. Specifically, the recommendations call for policymakers to responsibly address weight and health by adhering to the following evidence-based principles when

discussing and developing weight-related [health policies](#):

- Weight is about health, not appearance.
- Weight status does not necessarily reflect [health status](#).
- It takes more than [willpower](#) to maintain a healthy weight—a strong support system is necessary.
- Body size and shape are influenced by inherited and environmental factors.
- BMI is one of many factors in determining a person's weight status as it relates to health.
- Incremental and sustained weight loss advised by a doctor is safe and healthy—whereas crash diets are dangerous and can contribute to negative health outcomes.

The STOP Obesity Alliance and its Task Force on Women strongly support the new guidelines and are encouraging the public to take action in helping to gain their acceptance among [policymakers](#). The more than 20 groups that make up the Task Force are promoting a "Call to Action," asking individuals to contact their legislators and urge them to review and follow the recommendations.

"We must all make good, responsible choices when it comes to our health, but we also need policies that will support environments where good choices are possible," said Ferguson. "Until legislators focus on weight as a matter of health, policies will not be effective in addressing the nation's serious weight-related health challenges."

More information: Click here to read the full set of recommendations: www.stopobesityalliance.org/

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