

Improved diversity needed in membership, presidents at obesity/nutrition organizations

October 18 2021

New findings suggest that efforts are needed to increase the diversity of membership and leadership at the presidential level within obesity and nutrition-focused professional organizations. There is also a critical need to ensure a diverse cadre of nutrition and/or obesity scientists and healthcare professionals to combat obesity and related health challenges among people with obesity, according to a perspective study published online in *Obesity* journal. To date, researchers explain there has been no comprehensive effort to address progress in academia and healthcare in the obesity and nutrition fields for those who are underrepresented.

"We learned that there are opportunities for improvement in enhancing the racial and ethnic diversity of the membership and leadership of these organizations. Another key takeaway is the need for organizations to systematically collect and monitor race/ethnicity data among membership to ensure that the current status and future progress of diversity efforts can be more accurately characterized. Our goal is for this piece to raise awareness and stimulate action around the need for sustained efforts to increase diversity in obesity/nutrition medicine and research," said Tiffany L. Carson, Ph.D., MPH, FTOS, Department of Health Outcomes and Behavior, Division of Population Sciences, H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center & Research Institute, Tampa, Fla. Carson is the corresponding author of the study.

Researchers explain that professional organizations provide an opportunity to support scientific discovery and advance the career development of scientists from all groups. The racial and ethnic

representation, however, within professional organizations is not currently well described in the scientific literature.

The Obesity Society (TOS), Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) and American Society for Nutrition (ASN) were questioned using an emailed survey to provide racial and ethnic demographic data among the membership within their respective organizations within the past five years and among elected presidents within from 2010–2020. Current demographics of diplomates within the previous five years were also requested from the American Board of Obesity Medicine (ABOM), the physician credentialing board for obesity medicine. The requests for data were submitted as a brief survey sent to the [chief executive officer](#) for AND, chief knowledge officer for ASN, senior manager of member services for TOS and the director of physician relations for ABOM.

At the time of query, AND and ABOM had an established tracking system from which the requested data were provided. TOS and ASN did not have a tracking system for racial/ethnic data and were unable to provide the requested information.

Results for each organization include:

- **AND:** According to self-reported data, among the 93,320 registered dietitians and registered dietitian nutritionists, the racial/ethnic distribution was black (2.6%), Asian (3.9%), Latinx (3.1%), American Indian or Alaska Native (0.3%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1.3%), white (81.1%), other (1.2%), 2 or more races (0.5%), prefer not to answer (2.3%) and no response provided (3.6%). Of those who had served as AND presidents from 2010 to 2020, 2 of 10 identified as racial/ethnic minorities.
- **ABOM:** The organization reported a total of 4,148 certified diplomates. Racial/ethnic demographics among this group

included black (6.0%), Asian (20.9%), Latinx (5.0%), Native American (0.2%), white (35.5%), other (2.1%), prefer not to answer (3.8%) and no response provided (26.5%).

- **TOS:** Although racial/ethnic diversity is stated as a priority area for the current leadership, racial/ethnic demographics of members were not available at the time of query. For those who had served as TOS presidents from 2010–2020, none identified as racial/ethnic minorities.
- **ASN:** At the time of query, ASN's membership tracking system did not allow for tracking of racial/ethnic demographics of its 7,493 members from more than 100 countries. For those who had served as ASN presidents from 2010–2020, none identified as racial/ethnic minorities.

The study only assessed the leadership position of president at each organization. Researchers noted that it is possible that other positions of leadership (e.g., executive council members) that were not reviewed may reflect greater diversity in race or ethnicity.

"I think one of the most interesting things about this report is that it highlights the limited amount of data being tracked regarding the diversity of professionals in our organizations. As everyone knows, the things that are measured are the things that are managed. If we have not tracked these data historically, it is difficult to imagine that we would have dedicated strategies to address the challenge," said study co-author Jamy D. Ard, MD, professor and physician, Wake Forest School of Medicine, Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist, Winston-Salem, NC.

TOS's annual meeting this year will carry the president's theme of Diversity and Health Inequities. [ObesityWeek 2021](#) programming has been designed specifically to include diverse patient and scientist voices, and topics related to health inequities in obesity research.

"Improving diversity within TOS leadership and within the field of [obesity](#) is a priority for TOS, so that we can continue to make progress in these areas," said TOS President Catherine Kotz, Ph.D., FTOS, professor, University of Minnesota (Integrative Biology and Physiology), associate director of research, Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Care, Minneapolis VA Health Care System.

More information: "Racial and Ethnic Representation Among a Sample of Nutrition- and Obesity-Focused Professional Organizations in the United States," *Obesity*, [DOI: 10.1002/oby.23310](https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.23310)

Provided by The Obesity Society

Citation: Improved diversity needed in membership, presidents at obesity/nutrition organizations (2021, October 18) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-diversity-membership-obesitynutrition.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.
