

# NZNO Obesity Position Statement

## Purpose

The purpose of this statement is to make clear NZNO's standpoint on the increasing importance of obesity as a health issue, to provide links to resources, and to empower nurses and midwives to support their patients and advocate for healthy public policy.

## Introduction/Background

The proportion of adults and children in our population who are overweight and obese is increasing, as it is in most developed and many developing countries. There is debate about the role of genetics and epigenetics (how external or environmental factors interact with gene expression) in the development of obesity. But the rapid population level changes, and the changes in weight experienced by communities who migrate to live in countries with high levels of obesity, strongly suggest social and environmental factors are paramount. Obesity is a risk factor for heart disease, gestational and type 2 diabetes, some cancers, respiratory problems, joint disease and mobility problems, all of which, along with the social stigma associated with obesity, detract from quality of life. There are significant ethnic disparities, with Māori and Pasifika being over represented in obesity statistics, along with Asian and Indian ethnic groups, contributing further to health inequalities. The World Health Organisation describe the rising rates of obesity as the single biggest preventable health issue of our time and warns it will be a major contributor to the risk that the current generation of children may be the first generation to live shorter lives than their parents.

NZNO agrees obesity should be recognised as a public health priority. Following a review of the literature and position statements nationally and internationally and member consultation, NZNO endorses the *2014 New Zealand Medical Association policy briefing paper on obesity*. The briefing paper is comprehensive, specific to Aotearoa New Zealand and relevant to the practice of nurses and midwives. In addition to endorsing the New Zealand Medical Association paper, NZNO offers the following nursing perspectives.

## Nursing and obesity

- > Nurses and midwives are well placed to advise patients on the risks associated with overweight and obesity, and the importance of good nutrition and physical activity. Nurses can encourage healthy family lifestyle patterns across the lifespan; from supporting optimum prenatal nutrition and encouraging breast feeding, through to regular, nutritious family meals, and the many benefits of active lifestyles and regular exercise. Fear of offending patients, or embarrassment about so sensitive a topic, cannot override the need for clear, accurate and supportive health promotion.
- > Nurses working with children and young people, in particular, should ensure patients and their parents have the information and support they need to make the healthy choices that will help them avoid becoming overweight or obese.
- > Nurses should inform themselves about the psychosocial and cultural parameters that affect health behaviours associated with overweight and obesity, and the interventions and support available and that have been shown to be effective, to support their patients.

- > Nurses have a role in helping the public understand that overweight and obesity is predominantly a social-environmental condition, and are ideally placed to encourage and support individuals and family whānau affected by it.
- > Nurses advocate for healthy public policy, related to the provision of facilities for healthy physical activities, and policy options listed in the World Health Organisation's Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Non-Communicable Diseases 2013-2020. These include, for example, appropriate tax regimes to promote healthy, non-obesogenic food and drinks, and policies around providing healthy vending machines in schools and hospitals.
- > Nurses also advocate for introducing and enacting public policies related to reversing the widening deprivation and income gap in Aotearoa New Zealand, which is inextricably linked to health inequalities.
- > Nurses also demand appropriate availability of equipment (for example beds, chairs and lifting gear) that ensure patient dignity and patient and nurse safety.
- > Finally, though it is often challenging, nurses can enhance their own personal wellness and serve as role models by making the healthy choices they advocate for their patients.

## Resources

- > 2014 NZMA policy briefing paper on obesity.  
<https://www.nzma.org.nz/publications/tackling-obesity>
- > 2009 ICN on Obesity: Creating public awareness of a social environmental disease  
[http://www.icn.ch/images/stories/documents/publications/fact\\_sheets/13d\\_FS-Obesity.pdf](http://www.icn.ch/images/stories/documents/publications/fact_sheets/13d_FS-Obesity.pdf)
- > 2009 WHO Global Health risks report  
[www.who.int/healthinfo/global\\_burden\\_disease/GlobalHealthRisks\\_report\\_Front.pdf](http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/GlobalHealthRisks_report_Front.pdf)
- > The Obesity Society (America) Action, Education and research resources  
<http://www.obesity.org/publications/position-statements.htm>
- > The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (America) position statement  
<http://www.astho.org/Policy-and-Position-Statements/Position-Statement-on-Obesity-Prevention-and-Reduction/>
- > The Australian and NZ Obesity Society – prevention and promotion of better management  
<https://www.anzos.com/>
- > Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network, Treatment and prevention guidelines  
<http://www.sign.ac.uk/guidelines/fulltext/115/>
- > National Institute for Clinical Excellence (UK) Treatment and prevention guidelines

<http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph53>

- > American Heart and Stroke Association prevention and treatment guidelines  
[https://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm\\_428437.pdf](https://www.heart.org/idc/groups/heart-public/@wcm/@adv/documents/downloadable/ucm_428437.pdf)
- > World Obesity Federation: policy and prevention resources  
<http://www.worldobesity.org/what-we-do/policy-prevention/advocacy/position-statements/>
- > National Association of School Nurses (America) position statement  
<http://www.nasn.org/Overweight-Children-and-Adolescents-Adopted-2002>
- > National Association of Paediatric Nurse Practitioners (America) position statement  
<https://www.napnap.org/napnap-position-statements-0>
- > Background information about developmental risks -genetic/epigenetic, and their interaction with social and environmental factors. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/>
- > American Nurses Organisation position statement  
<http://www.nursingworld.org/MainMenuCategories/ANAMarketplace/ANAPeriodicals/OJIN/TaleofContents/Vol142009/No1Jan09/Prevention-of-Childhood-Obesity.html>
- > Useful publications by Professor Sir Peter Gluckman, Chief Science Advisor Science  
<http://www.nature.com/ijo/journal/v32/n7s/full/ijo2008240a.html>

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**Mission statement**

NZNO is committed to the representation of members and the promotion of nursing and midwifery. NZNO embraces Te Tiriti o Waitangi and works to improve the health status of all peoples of Aotearoa/ New Zealand through participation in health and social policy development.

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