

Addressing weight stigma at work



Weight stigma — unfair treatment, discrimination, or abuse because of one's weight — is a widespread societal issue. And the deep-rooted biases about weight carry through to the workplace.

For employees, weight stigma can negatively impact their health, limit their career opportunities, and reduce their pay. Employers also feel the sting through repercussions on company culture, recruiting and retention, and healthcare costs.

Here's the good news: With Americans spending about 71% of their time at work,¹ employers are uniquely positioned to make a real difference. By taking the lead in addressing weight stigma, companies can create healthier, more inclusive workplaces that benefit everyone.

Weight stigma by the numbers



1 in 3

American adults are classified as overweight²



2 in 5

meet the clinical definition of obesity²



40%

have experienced weight-related stigma³

¹ [How many work hours in a year? We counted the days and crunched the numbers](#), USA Today, October 2023.

² Fryar CD, Carroll MD, Afful J. (2020). [Prevalence of overweight, obesity, and severe obesity among adults aged 20 and over: United States, 1960–1962 through 2017–2018](#). NCHS Health E-Stats, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

³ Lee, K.M., Hunger, J.M. & Tomiyama, A.J. (2021). [Weight stigma and health behaviors: evidence from the Eating in America Study](#). Int J Obes 45, 1499–1509.



ADDRESSING WEIGHT STIGMA:

8 actions employers can take

- 1 Assess the current state.** Review HR data and employee survey responses for potential bias and discrimination patterns linked to employee experiences, compensation, promotions, or recruiting.
- 2 Review the organization's inclusion policies.** Add or enhance policies to address weight-related bias, harassment, and discrimination. Ensure accessible facilities and accommodations for employees of all sizes, such as appropriately sized furniture, equipment, and restroom facilities.
- 3 Ensure equity in hiring, promotion, and performance evaluations** to emphasize job-related criteria, qualifications, and contributions.
- 4 Shift the focus of employee benefit programs from weight loss to weight health.** Offer employees access to a full spectrum of solutions, from behavioral health to coaching and clinical support.
- 5 Review healthcare plans** to identify opportunities to provide comprehensive coverage for weight health, such as behavioral therapy, nutritional counseling, and anti-obesity medications.
- 6 Provide training and education** to raise awareness about weight stigma and unconscious biases related to body size. Challenge stereotypes and promote more inclusive attitudes.
- 7 Encourage the formation of employee resource groups** focused on body positivity and size inclusivity. These groups can engage employees and help them advocate for change, offer support, and normalize discussions around weight stigma and discrimination.
- 8 Foster an open and supportive culture** where employees feel comfortable reporting incidents of weight-based discrimination or microaggressions without fear of retaliation.



Want to learn more about weight stigma at work and how employers can shift the narrative? Download our latest white paper.

