

Management of eating disorders for people with higher weight: clinical practice guideline

Plain English summary for consumers

The Guideline

The National Eating Disorders Collaboration (NEDC) has developed a clinical practice guideline for the management of eating disorders for people with higher weight. The Guideline was developed by a development group comprising academic and clinical expertise, and lived experience. The Guideline was developed following standards outlined by the Australian government's National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). These standards involve considering research evidence with input from clinical experts and people with lived experience, including their families and supports.

The Guideline is intended for all health professionals across varied disciplines and settings of practice. This resource presents a short summary in plain English for consumers. You can access the full guideline [here](#).

Background

- Eating disorders are serious, complex and potentially life-threatening mental illnesses.
- Eating disorders can occur across a range of body weights, shapes and sizes. Eating disorders are common in people with higher weight.
- Eating disorders in people with higher weight are under-recognised and under-treated. People who are of higher weight and experiencing an eating disorder often experience delayed identification of the eating disorder, misdiagnoses in assessment, subsequent inappropriate and inadequate treatment and widespread stigma. Access more information about weight stigma [here](#).
- Eating disorders in people with higher weight are just as serious and life threatening (from medical complications and self-harm) as eating disorders among people with lower weight [2-5].
- Eating disorders in people of any weight are associated with high levels of psychological distress and mental disorders [6].

Key points

Identification

- Early intervention is crucial and provides the best chance of recovery from an eating disorder. Many people with eating disorders and higher weight are not aware they have an eating disorder. These people frequently present for weight loss treatment [7].

Treatment

- Evidence-based treatments for eating disorders experienced by people with higher weight exist. [These may be rebated under Medicare](#). Treatment encompasses, but is not limited to psychological, pharmacological, nutritional and activity interventions.
- Eating disorders are complex and multifaceted and treatment should address all aspects of the eating disorder. While the minimum treatment team is a medical practitioner and a mental health professional, input from health professionals from a range of disciplines (e.g., dietitians, psychiatrists) is often necessary for comprehensive care. Family and other supports are integral to the [care team](#). [Treatment and management by health professionals, including dietetic care, may be rebated under Medicare](#).

Weight stigma

- The under-recognition and under-treatment of eating disorders is often due to the effects of [weight stigma](#).
- Weight stigma is common and causes harm. One important aspect in addressing weight stigma is in the use of language that is affirming and inclusive for someone with higher weight. For this reason, the Guideline uses the phrases 'people with higher weight' and 'living in a larger body'. These terms were chosen based on consultation with people with lived experience of eating disorders as well as existing literature in this area [e.g., 9, 10]. Notwithstanding this approach, it is important to emphasise that there is not one universally preferred term for people living in larger bodies. People with lived experience of eating disorders and higher weight are encouraged to discuss their preferred language with their health professionals.
- Weight loss should not be "automatically" praised and reinforced by anyone including health professionals, family members or friends. Eating disorders do not resolve with weight loss and require targeted, evidence-based treatment for the eating disorder.

Getting help

If you think that you or someone you care about has an eating disorder, it is important to seek help immediately. The earlier you seek help the closer you are to recovery. Your GP is a good 'first base' to seek support and access eating disorders treatment. To find help in your local area go to [NEDC Support and Services](#).

Additionally, call the Butterfly National Helpline (1800 33 4673) for support from trained counsellors and more information on available services.

