

QUEBEC MANIFESTO FOR HEALTHY COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT WEIGHT-RELATED ISSUES

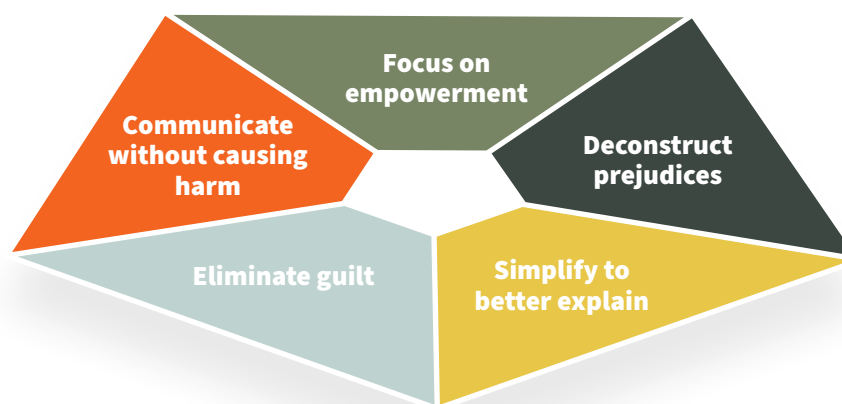
Weight-related issues, including excessive preoccupation with weight, obesity, and fatphobia¹, are cross-cutting public health issues involving many stakeholders in all spheres of society. Understanding them requires a multipronged approach mobilizing human, social, and biomedical sciences, among other fields, as well as experiential knowledge.

While these issues have been a topic of discussion in Quebec for several decades, the ongoing evolution of scientific knowledge, values, and social context has complexified our understanding of weight-related messaging by highlighting biases and raising issues such as weight stigma. Thus, it is believed that certain health messages perpetuate the thin ideal and fuel fatphobia.

Being unidirectional, communications aimed at the general public should be clear and simple to be effective and understood. If we are to avoid causing harm, it is important to rethink the way we address weight-related issues in the population.

Thus, the following guiding principles can be used to help create positive population-based messages. They define ideas and concepts to emphasize and set the tone for resulting communication strategies and tools. They provide a foundation for building messages adapted to different target audiences.

These guiding principles aim to harmonize and ensure the consistency of the messages conveyed to the population by the different stakeholders. Non-hierarchical and interdependent, these guiding principles are based on the following foundations:



¹ Fatphobia refers to all attitudes and behaviours that stigmatize and discriminate against people whose weight is considered too high. This phenomenon includes weight stigma.

Guiding principles

Weight is influenced by a variety of environmental and individual factors.

- The factors influencing weight are multiple and interrelated (e.g., genetic, psychological, lifestyle, family, body type, dietary, socioeconomic, cultural, etc.).
- The factors influencing weight vary from one individual to another.
- The relationship between weight and physical and mental health varies between individuals.
- Weight and body mass index (BMI) are not direct measures of health.
- The relationship between weight and health is influenced by several factors, such as the distribution and location of adipose tissue, lifestyle habits, genetics, and the experience of stigma.
- Each person experiences their weight differently and is free to act or not in this regard according to their conception of well-being.

Messages focused on weight and weight loss can have harmful effects.

- These messages induce fatphobia, which is harmful to the physical and psychological health of individuals.
- These messages lead to excessive preoccupation with weight, which can give rise to unhealthy behaviours.
- Individuals have limited control over their weight.
- It is difficult to lose weight sustainably.
- The weight loss industry reinforces myths about weight and perpetuates false beliefs.
- Population-based messages should encourage those who need individualized support to consult qualified health professionals.

Positive messages focused on lifestyle habits conducive to well-being and health should be favoured.

- Everyone benefits from adopting lifestyle habits that promote well-being and health, regardless of one's weight.
- The adoption of lifestyle habits favourable to well-being and health tends to be more successful when it is based on pleasure, as opposed to a desire to lose or manage weight.
- Messages must be formulated to be inclusive and guilt-free, without targeting perfection or encouraging performance.

Adopting a respectful, caring, and inclusive approach makes it possible to disseminate non-stigmatizing messages to the population.

- The risk of weight stigma can be reduced by including the people concerned in the choice of vocabulary and in the composition of messages.
- Using positive images helps deconstruct prejudices.
- The representation of body diversity reflects the different realities experienced within the population.
- The potential effect of messages about weight and obesity on mental health must be considered.

Thus, we make a common commitment to review and adapt our communications about weight-related issues in light of these guidelines, in order to ensure that everyone can flourish in environments conducive to well-being and health.

— *Provincial Working Group on Weight-Related Issues, 2021*