

# ADVOCACY:

## A Not So Scary Word after All

*by Mckinzie Step, OAC Community Outreach Engagement Specialist*

**Where would we be if at some point in history, no one ever stood up to defend the rights of people of all races and backgrounds? What if no one ever fought for our voting rights, fair labor practices or even our right to have an education?**

Every cause needs the help of advocates. And yet, very few people have a grasp on what this word really means. What does it mean to be an advocate? How does someone “do” advocacy?

### **Advocacy is Not What You Think**

When you think about advocacy, you wouldn't be alone if you conjured up images of lobbyists arguing their case in front of government officials. You might even think of large crowds holding picket signs in front of major landmarks and other important buildings.

Those images aren't wrong, but they also aren't complete. Advocacy takes many different forms. In fact, some might argue the most effective type of advocacy isn't done by professionals or protesters, but by everyday people in their everyday lives.

By definition, advocacy means support for a cause – that's it! It doesn't require you to be a public speaker or a social media celebrity. Advocates show support of all kinds for issues they care about and want to change. They are the unsung heroes of progress big and small.

### **Why Does the OAC Need Advocates?**

Weight stigma and weight bias are still prevalent and found just about everywhere. Because of this, individuals affected by obesity often face many different barriers – barriers affecting their healthcare, employment and all other aspects of their lives.

The OAC has a strong and guiding vision of creating a better world for people living with obesity. Our Community Members, supporters and volunteers work tirelessly to:

- Combat weight stigma, bias and discrimination.
- Raise obesity awareness through education.
- Improve access to safe and effective treatment options.
- Support those affected by obesity and let them know they are not alone.

These sound like deserving and sensible goals, don't they? But once again, weight stigma comes barreling in to try and shut the door to change we so desperately need.

Are you ready for the truth? These goals are painfully difficult to achieve because obesity is so stigmatized. But on the brighter side, support for a cause grows when advocates make that cause familiar to others. That's why the OAC needs advocates to help us share our message and meet these necessary goals. And with your support, we can!

## What is **OAC Action**?

**OAC Action** is any kind of action or good deed that helps move the work of the OAC forward. All of us need to get **#OACAction** trending on social media!

### Easy Ways to Advocate with the OAC

The great thing about the OAC's mission is that there are many unique and diverse ways to advocate and take **OAC Action**! Let's take a brief but closer look at a few of them.

#### Weight Bias Actions:

Help others identify weight bias and take a stand against stigma! You can:

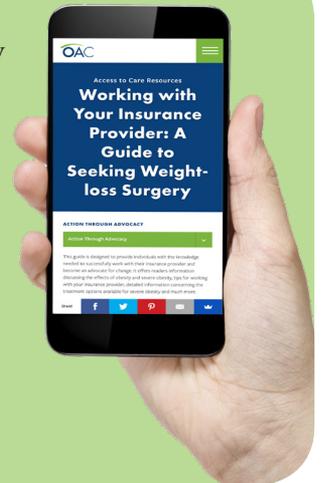
- Tweet/post replies to social media articles displaying weight bias.
- Thank a company or organization for using respectful language or visuals.
- Discuss People-First language with family and friends.
- Write a note to a TV show, radio station or celebrity for showing stigma.
- Report a weight bias issue at: **ObesityAction.org/Action-Center/ Report-Issues.**



#### Access to Care Actions:

Help advance access to science-based obesity treatments and appropriate care! You can:

- Share the OAC's Insurance Guide.
- Thank your employer/insurer for covering obesity care.
- Use social media to share your healthcare successes and challenges.
- Share your successful appeal letter with the OAC or via social media.
- Report an access issue at: **ObesityAction.org/Action-Center/ Report-Issues.**



#### Policy Actions:

Play a part in influencing decision makers and the policies they enact! You can:

- Write to your state legislators urging them to support the Treat and Reduce Obesity Act (TROA).
- Support broader coverage of obesity treatment services for state employees and Medicaid beneficiaries.
- Ask officials in your county or city to expand resources and services for individuals trying to manage their obesity.



## Outreach Actions:

Raise awareness of obesity as a cause and introduce more people to the OAC! You can:

- Leave *Weight Matters Magazine* copies in your doctor's office, salon, library, gym, coffee shop or nail salon.
- Bring OAC educational resources to local universities, hospitals, clinics, etc.
- Tell others about the OAC at your support group, church, PTA, etc.
- Offer to host an OAC booth at your community/employer health fair.



# WHAT NOW CHECKLIST

## A Convenient Place to Do it All

There are so many different ways to be an advocate, fight for change and make the world a better place for individuals affected by obesity. Luckily, we've created an easy way for you to stay in-the-know about current issues and explore available action opportunities!

OAC's Advocacy Action Center is your "One Stop Shop" for taking **OAC Action**. You can visit our Action Center at the click of a button by visiting: **ObesityAction.org/Action-Center**.

Here you'll find opportunities to advocate on issues ranging from education outreach to weight bias and policy. Before clicking through, we encourage you to take a moment, think about the issues/topics that matter most to you and dive-in to explore opportunities you'll find personally rewarding! Remember that actions of any size make a difference and help us drive change.

## Tying it All Together: OAC Action!

By now you know that advocacy doesn't look the same for everyone – and that's okay! The OAC needs all kinds of advocates with all kinds of skills and passions to join our fight.

We also invite you to think outside the box! If there's an action opportunity you want to take that we haven't discussed or posted online, share it with us. If there's an issue you care about that we haven't publicly supported, that's okay too. The OAC's goal is to give you all the resources and information you need to be an advocate in your own way.

One thing is for certain: we want to know what you're up to! If you do any kind of advocacy, let us know by using the **#OACAction** hashtag on social media or shooting us a message. It helps to know what advocates are doing in their communities so we can recognize them, join along and spread the word. We are more powerful together than on our own!



We'll leave on an end note worth considering:

### About the Author:

*Mckinzie Step, OAC Community Outreach Engagement Specialist, has a passion for connecting individuals affected by obesity and giving them any support, resources or education they may need. She is a dedicated OAC advocate both in her professional and personal life, and her goal is to unite and inspire OAC's Community to continue making lasting change. To contact Mckinzie about sharing your story or getting more involved with the OAC, email: [Mstep@obesityaction.org](mailto:Mstep@obesityaction.org).*

Are you ready to take your first dive (or your next dive) into advocacy? Here's a quick list of things to do and have handy in your **OAC Action** toolbox:

- Identify your skills, interests and issues you care about.
- Visit OAC's Action Center at: **ObesityAction.org/Action-Center**.
- Identify and get to know your local, state and national legislators.
- Identify ways you'd like to advocate and jump in!
- Leverage OAC's website, resources and tool where possible.
- Educate yourself on current issues, causes and topics.
- If sharing with or responding to others, offer constructive feedback/information.
- Tell us when you take **OAC Action!**

*"Do what you can, where you are, with what you have." – Theodore Roosevelt*



# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

## LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

### Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
  - Community Discussion Forum
  - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



**JOIN TODAY: GO TO [OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN](http://OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN)**

[info@obesityaction.org](mailto:info@obesityaction.org)

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