World Obesity Day: Everybody needs to act

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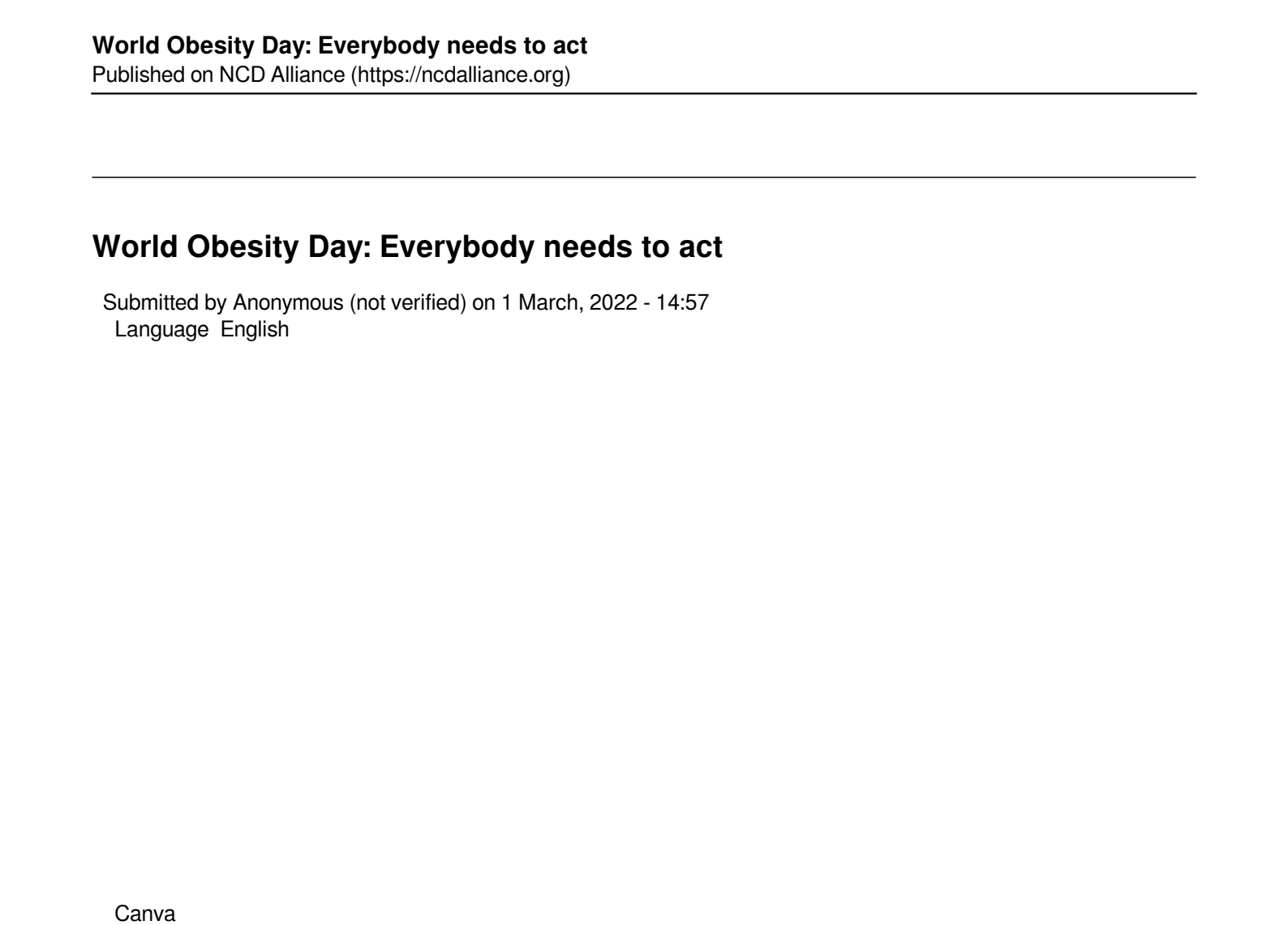

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Celebrated annually on March 4th, World Obesity Day is a unified day of action that calls for a cohesive, cross-sector response to the global issue of obesity.

Previous World Obesity Days have established strong foundations, encouraging people to increase their knowledge of obesity and its root causes, tackle weight stigma and listen to the voices of people with lived experience. This year, we are focusing on the simple message that 'Everybody Needs to Act' to improve the world's understanding, prevention and treatment of obesity.

World Obesity Day: Everybody needs to act

One look at global obesity rates is enough to tell you that we're not where we need to be, with almost one in every six adults worldwide currently living with obesity. In fact, numbers have been rising steadily for the past several decades, with global prevalence of obesity nearly tripling since 1975. This trend is not only confined to today's adult population: childhood obesity has increased a shocking tenfold [1] in four decades, and is predicted to reach 254 million by 2030 [2] without substantial action.

At present, all countries are seriously off-track to meet the WHO 2025 obesity targets, further jeopardising the achievement of other NCD, SDG and Triple Billion Targets. While it is clear that the previously-set targets won't be achieved by 2025, Member States across the world have an unprecedented opportunity to implement bold, innovative policies and come together for World Obesity Day to achieve the change we need.

Obesity is a global problem

Once viewed as a problem for the most developed countries, obesity is rising on every continent, with the largest increases now observed in the South Asian region and parts of Africa – areas which are, in many cases, still grappling with undernutrition. Almost half [3] of the children under 5 who were living with overweight or obesity in 2019 lived in

Asia. In Africa, the number of children under the age of 5 with overweight increased by nearly 24% percent since 2000.

Actions to date have failed, and this is unacceptable. The persistent misunderstanding of, underinvestment in and unacceptable bias against obesity and those affected by it all contribute to ongoing policy inertia. If we are to successfully address obesity, we need to move away from single-silo solutions, and focus on addressing the root causes and implementing a comprehensive policy package across prevention and treatment.

An Action Plan on Obesity

Our message for governments around the world is simple; a disjointed response, lack of ambition, and inaction is hurting the most vulnerable, and the impact couldn't be more striking than it is today. We need more from our leaders; we need governance that puts the health and wellbeing of its people first.

Nevertheless, the global community also has an unprecedented window of opportunity to break our "business as usual" approach. In the run-up to the World Health Assembly in May, we are calling for the development of an Action Plan on Obesity to support countries and help accelerate national action. Such a plan would also bring together all existing actions, including the WHO's recent draft recommendations and wider work to accelerate action on obesity in priority countries (Annex 9), under one framework. This plan should cover prevention and treatment across the life course, be adaptable for different contexts, and put people at the centre.

What will you do this 4th March?

In the meantime, we can continue to make progress. Hundreds of individuals, organisations and alliances contribute to World Obesity Day every year, engaging hundreds of thousands of people across the world. Everybody has their part to play. Find out more on how to get involved and support the cause on the World Obesity Day website [4]!

This World Obesity Day, we are calling for:

- **A Global Action Plan on Obesity**.
- **Simple actions** from four core public groups: People living with obesity, healthcare professionals, employers, and policymakers and advocates. Some examples include sharing stories, signing up to obesity education and training, and supporting the day on social media.
- **Regional action and expertise.** Obesity is a global problem, but different regions face distinct challenges and priorities. This World Obesity Day, the messages of national, regional and community organisations will be front and centre. This is a global call for change, but it's made up of hundreds of local voices.
- **Ongoing action:** World Obesity Day is just one day; action is ongoing year-round. We are celebrating this through a series of stories and case studies from campaign supporters and see WOD as a chance to make connections and amplify a continuous global conversation.

This World Obesity Day, we're here to turn the tide. We're calling for action to tackle rising levels of childhood and adult obesity, to reduce the stigma faced by people living with obesity, and to improve the systems that contribute to obesity around the world. Join us!

About the author

Margot Neveux is a Senior Policy Manager at World Obesity Federation. Margot has been with the World Obesity Federation since 2018. Dedicated to making the voices of youth more prominent in global NCD plans and responses, Margot has also been actively working towards increasing youth representation and engagement in World Obesity's work through a number of projects and initiatives.

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