



# Australia's Attitude Problem

The Stigma of Medical Weight Loss



Research commissioned  
and report written by

**Juniper**



## **Australia's Attitude Problem** The Stigma of Medical Weight Loss

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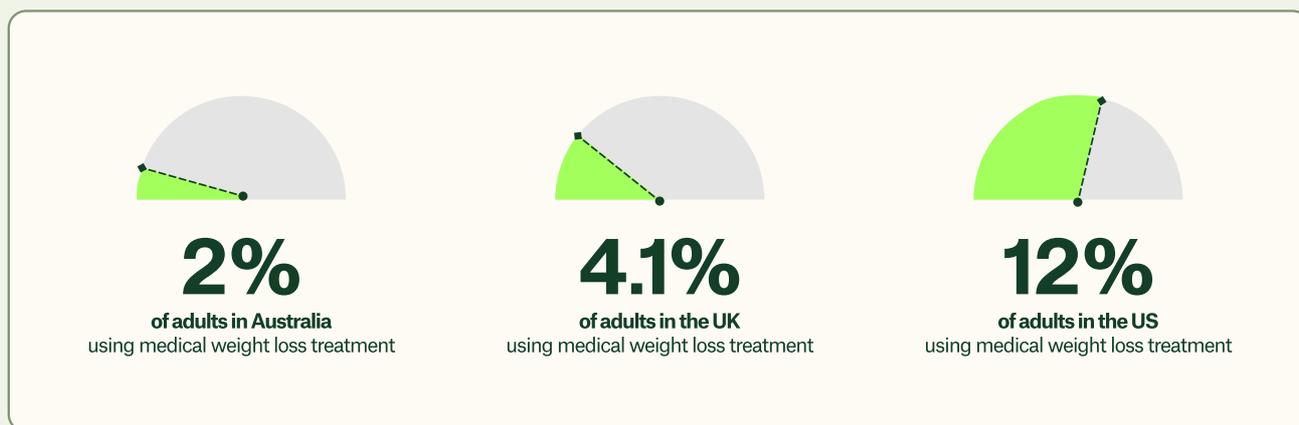
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# Executive summary

Today, medical weight loss treatments are a staple of the cultural zeitgeist.

From the latest celebrity transformations to widespread interest in new research findings, the use, side effects, and impacts of this class of medical treatment are now readily discussed in media, on social platforms, and between friends, families, and colleagues.

**And beyond the cultural fascination, medical weight loss is also becoming increasingly prevalent in its adoption.** Over 2% of Australian adults<sup>[1]</sup> are reported to use a medical weight loss treatment. In the UK, this rises to 4.1%.<sup>[2]</sup> In the US, it jumps to almost 12%.<sup>[3]</sup>



Source [1] [2] [3]

Yet despite their cultural ubiquity and increasingly widespread use, a stigma around the medical treatment persists.

As a provider of weight management care, Juniper sees the impact of stigma every day, reflected in patient feedback and broader conversations about weight and health.

[1]Falster, M.O., et al (2025). 'Trends in publicly subsidised and private access in Australia, 2020–2025.' *medRxiv*, 30 October. doi:10.1101/2025.10.30.25339120

[2]Kantar. (2025). The next big disruptor in society. Kantar, 12 August

[3]Bozick, R., Donofry, S. and Rancaño, K.M. (2025). Nearly 12 percent of Americans have used medical weight loss treatments; use highest among women aged 50 to 64. RAND Corporation.

We know stigma around medical weight loss has real consequences. It fuels shame and secrecy, forcing many people to manage their health in silence. It contributes to harmful narratives and beliefs, which feed directly into how people are viewed and treated.

Excess weight is now the leading modifiable risk factor for ill health in Australia.<sup>[4]</sup> This isn't a question of aesthetics or vanity, it is a question of life and death.

The use of medical weight loss treatments is a taboo that needs to be broken. That is why we are confronting this stigma head on. Our latest research, drawing from a nationally representative PureProfile study in both Australia and the UK, and Juniper's own patient cohort survey, explores attitudes to medical weight loss and the impact of these attitudes on patients.

**This work is part of our ongoing commitment to change the conversation around medical weight loss. Until stigma is confronted, medical weight loss will remain something Australians feel they must justify, conceal or endure in silence. Changing that reality is now critical.**

## Methodology

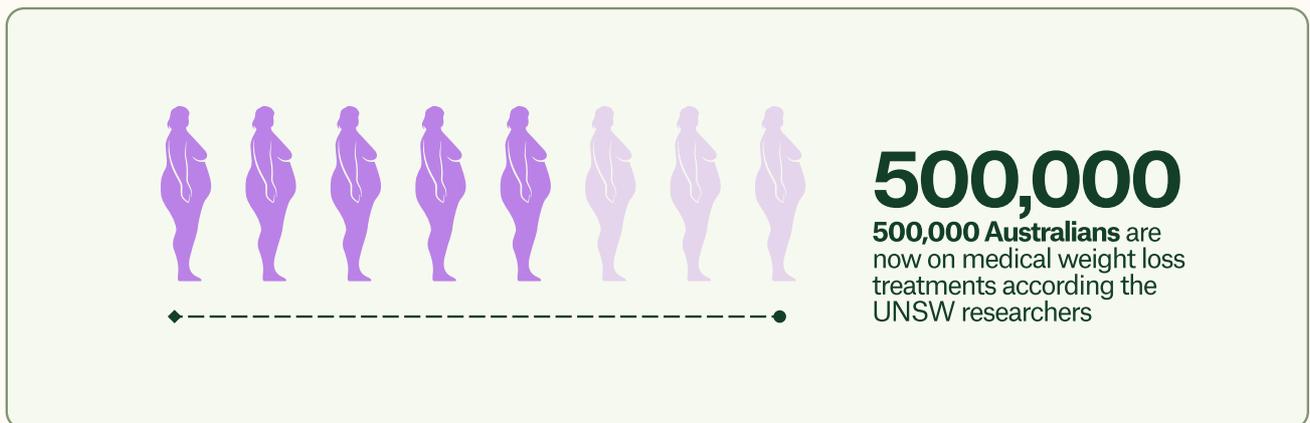
This study was conducted online by PureProfile on behalf of Juniper between 15-19 December 2025 in Australia and 15-29 December 2025 in the UK.

The sample comprised 1,009 Australian consumers and 1,029 British consumers. Following the completion of the survey, the data was weighted by age and region to reflect population estimates. The Juniper patient survey ran from 11-17 December 2025 in Australia and received responses from 2,082 Juniper members. It ran from 18-24 December 2025 in the UK and received responses from 2,967 Juniper members.

[4] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2024, "Living with overweight or obesity overtakes tobacco as new leading burden of disease risk factor", Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (website).

# Use of medical weight loss treatments: Australia's not-so-secret fascination

The use of medical weight loss treatment is increasingly common among Australians. According to a study by University of NSW researchers, 500,000 Australians are now on medical treatment for weight loss.<sup>[5]</sup>



The use of medical weight loss treatments is no longer a niche undertaking. In fact, the scale of adoption in Australia is a similar figure to those who:

- Live with a cancer diagnosis, with over 512,000 Australians living with a cancer diagnosis within a 5-year period as of 2020.<sup>[6]</sup>
- Are expected to benefit from the National Disability Insurance Scheme, with approximately 500,000 people set to receive support for disability-related needs, including activities and therapies.<sup>[7]</sup>
- Play Aussie Rules, with around 528,000 Australians participating in Australian Rules Football in 2024.<sup>[8]</sup>
- Play soccer, with around 570,000 Australians aged 14+ regularly playing soccer.<sup>[9]</sup>

[5]Falster, M.O., et al (2025). 'Trends in publicly subsidised and private access in Australia, 2020–2025'. medRxiv. doi:10.1101/2025.10.30.25339120

[6]Cancer Australia. (2025). 'Five-year prevalence'. National Cancer Control Indicators.

[7]Recovery Alliance Care. (n.d.), 'Understanding the NDIS'. Recovery Alliance Care (website).

[8]AFL. (2024). 'Football community sets new participation record in 2024'. AFL (website).

[9]Roy Morgan. (2023). 'Walking, swimming and gym training are the most popular sports and activities Australians do regularly', Roy Morgan (website).

Medical weight loss is now as much a part of Australian life as our favourite sports, most discussed illness, and one of Australia's single largest government expenditures.

Given the attention, focus, and understanding these issues receive, medical weight loss treatments should be considered mainstream. However, in culture, they are still often treated as fringe or suspect.

This doesn't mean they're hiding in the shadows. More than 70% of Australians have heard of specific medical weight loss treatments. Their use has become a topic of watercooler conversation to rival our national pastimes of property and the weather.

Almost half (46.7%) of Australians say they know someone on a medical weight loss treatment and a similar number (43.2%) have had a conversation about them in the last 6 months.

Unsurprisingly, the use of medical weight loss treatments are also a source of fascination for consumers, politicians, and the media.

**Coverage of medical weight loss in Australian media has increased by almost 400% between 2023 (2,493 mentions) and 2025 (12,415 mentions), including by 140% between 2024 (5,162 mentions) and 2025 alone.<sup>[10]</sup>**

It's not just the media. Google search data demonstrates the degree of interest among the Australian public, particularly when compared to topics that often dominate the cultural conversation.

[10]Meltwater media analysis, January 2026

- By mid-2024, search interest for a well-known medical weight loss method<sup>[a]</sup> frequently spiked higher than cultural titan Bluey during non-broadcast weeks.
- The cumulative searches for medical weight management services in Australia over the course of 2024–2025 far exceeded the total searches for Taylor Swift’s Eras tour when it was down under.
- By late 2025, search interest for terms associated with medical weight loss treatments began to rival one of Australia’s most discussed topics "rental properties Sydney" in volume.



## CASE STUDY

# Dr Jana Pittman - Juniper Clinical Advisor, OBGYN Registrar and Women's Health Advocate

**Jana Pittman has spent her life in high-performance environments, first as a two-time Olympian and world champion athlete and now in medicine,** while also navigating pregnancy, post-partum bodies and the scrutiny that comes with being a woman. Now a fierce advocate for women's health, she has been open about the realities of body change, medical support and stigma across different stages of life.

She says stigma around medical weight loss reflects a deeper discomfort with women seeking support for their health, particularly when that support challenges outdated ideas about effort, morality and control.

*"I see so many people struggling with weight - and with the shame that comes with it."*

*"That shame now extends to scientifically backed methods to help manage weight."*

“Typically, we don’t morally judge people for using medical tools. We don’t accuse them of ‘cheating’. We don’t tell them they just need more willpower.

“But weight seems to be different. So many are opinionated about other people’s bodies and choices. They feel entitled to criticise people who are genuinely trying to improve their health.

“Life is hard enough without hiding in shame about the choices we make to look after our health.

“Removing shame does not mean removing debate. There absolutely needs to be clear, considered conversations about cost, access, long term use and safeguards, and about ensuring these tools are used appropriately and that vulnerable people are protected. That is a necessary and responsible discussion.

“But that conversation should be grounded in science and compassion, not judgement. The goal should always be to improve overall health behaviours and build better habits, overseen by proper care.

***“I am a highly motivated person. I’ve represented Australia in sport. I’ve trained through pain, pregnancy, setbacks and reinvention. And yet, weight management has always been hard for me.***

“I was called fat by classmates during puberty, which pushed me into sport in the first place. Even then, as an elite athlete, I was constantly told I was too heavy. After having children, I found it incredibly difficult to shift the weight again. Yes, I’ve had periods where I was very lean - too lean, in fact - but it came at a huge mental cost. It was a daily battle that played havoc with my self-esteem and my relationship with food and my body.

***“I know that support matters. Open conversations matter. And sustainable change is far more likely to come from understanding than from judgement.***

***“It’s time we stopped moralising weight - and started supporting people instead.”***

# Views on medical weight loss: The scourge of stigma

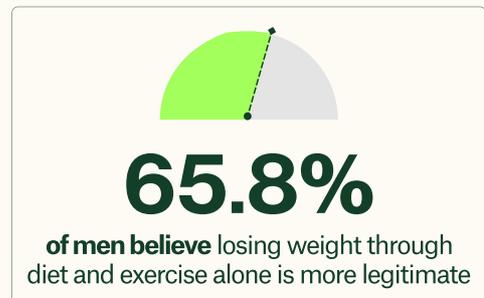
## STICKY STIGMA

Despite the ubiquity of the conversation, stigma around medical weight loss treatment usage persists.

A majority of Australians (61.6%) believe losing weight through diet and exercise alone is more legitimate than losing weight using medical treatment.

The gender split is marked on this metric, with 65.8% of men believing losing weight through diet and exercise alone is more legitimate than losing weight using medical treatment, compared to 57.9% of women.

Somewhat remarkably, Gen Z hold some of the strongest views, with 70.5% of this generation believing that losing weight through diet and exercise alone is more legitimate than losing weight using medical treatment - second only to those born before 1945 (72.4%).



Research shows Gen Z are typically less judgemental about societal issues.<sup>[11]</sup> **This may therefore suggest that this stigma is not passed on through generations and entrenched cultural positions, but is rather driven by social media wellness culture and algorithm-driven fitness and motivation content.**

[11]Chowdhury, I. (2024). 'Australia's young people are moving to the left – though young women are more progressive than men, reflecting a global trend', The Conversation.

Stigma isn't just to be found in the peanut gallery - it's also common among those who have a first-person connection to people with lived experience of medical weight loss, with 60% of those who know someone on medical weight loss treatment believing that losing weight through diet and exercise alone is more legitimate than with medical treatment support.

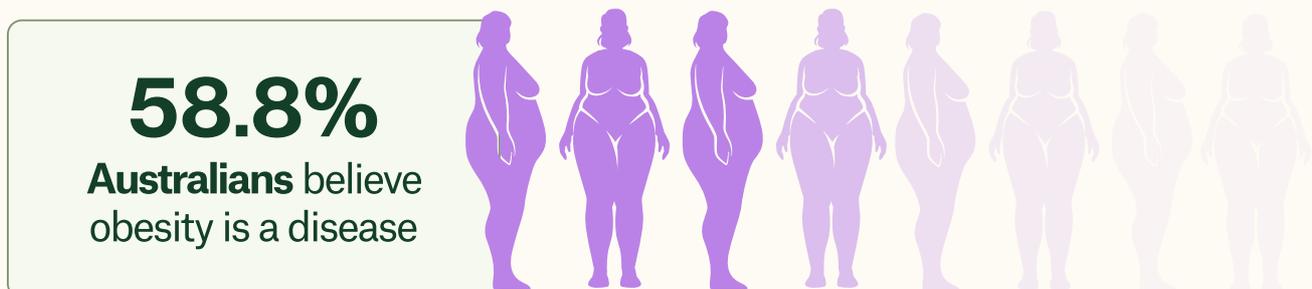
Although those who know someone on medical weight loss treatment are slightly below the national average (60.2%) in believing that losing weight through diet and exercise alone is more legitimate than through clinical treatment, the persistence of stigma remains evident even among those with exposure to lived experience.

In terms of geographical split, Queensland leads the way in believing this stigma, with 71.4% of respondents saying they believe losing weight through diet and exercise alone is more legitimate than losing weight using medical treatment

## WEIGHT MANAGEMENT MISUNDERSTANDING

Much of these stigmatised attitudes can be attributed to a misunderstanding of obesity and weight management.

Only 58.8% of Australians believe obesity is a disease, despite it being officially classified as such by the World Health Organisation (WHO).<sup>[12]</sup> Part of the issue here may be that obesity is not classified by Australian health authorities as a disease, despite other countries doing so.



[12]World Health Organization. (2025). *Obesity and overweight*. WHO Fact Sheet.

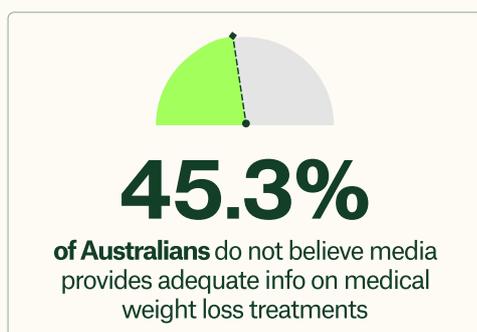
When the system refuses to classify obesity as a disease, it legitimises judgement, not care.

This view undoubtedly informs approaches to weight management, with 34% of Australians agreeing to some extent that weight management is a matter of only willpower. Once again, there is a clear gender split here, with 39.7% of men agreeing to some extent with this statement, compared to 28.7% of women.

This supports previous Juniper research, which found that 1 in 5 (20%) of Australians surveyed by YouGov said they believed using medical weight loss was ‘cheating’.<sup>[13]</sup>

## LACK OF ADEQUATE ACCESS TO INFORMATION

With medical weight loss treatments being a common topic of conversation, it is only natural that people would seek further information about them. However, there remains a clear lack of reliable and credible information to help individuals form an informed understanding of these treatments.



Almost half (45.3%) of survey respondents in Australia do not believe the media provides access to adequate information to allow them to form informed views on clinical treatment options for weight loss. This is a clear gap to the UK, where just 38% report a similar view.

With the media often failing to provide access to adequate information, people naturally turn to other sources. However, 35.8% of Australian respondents say friends and family are not useful sources when it comes to adequate information on the topic of medical weight loss, while 30.6% say this about online search or AI search tools.

[13]Juniper. (n.d.). Reclaim the Narrative. Juniper.

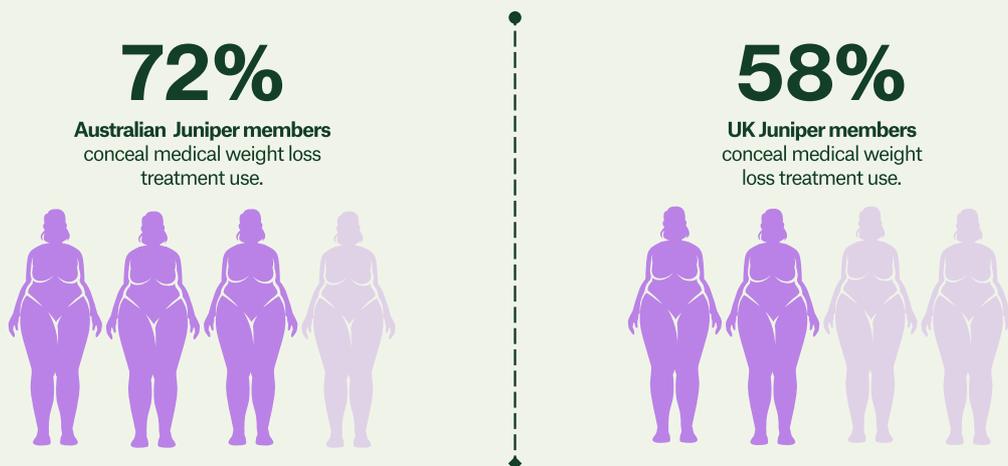
# Patient focus: The impact of stigma

## HIDDEN STORIES

The stigma around seeking medical treatment for weight loss has real impacts.

Australian users of medical weight loss often feel compelled to hide their treatment use for fear of judgement.

Almost 3 in 4 Juniper members in Australia (72%) have hidden their use of medical weight loss treatment from a family member, friend, or colleague. This compares unfavourably with Juniper members in the UK, where 58% report hiding their treatment use.

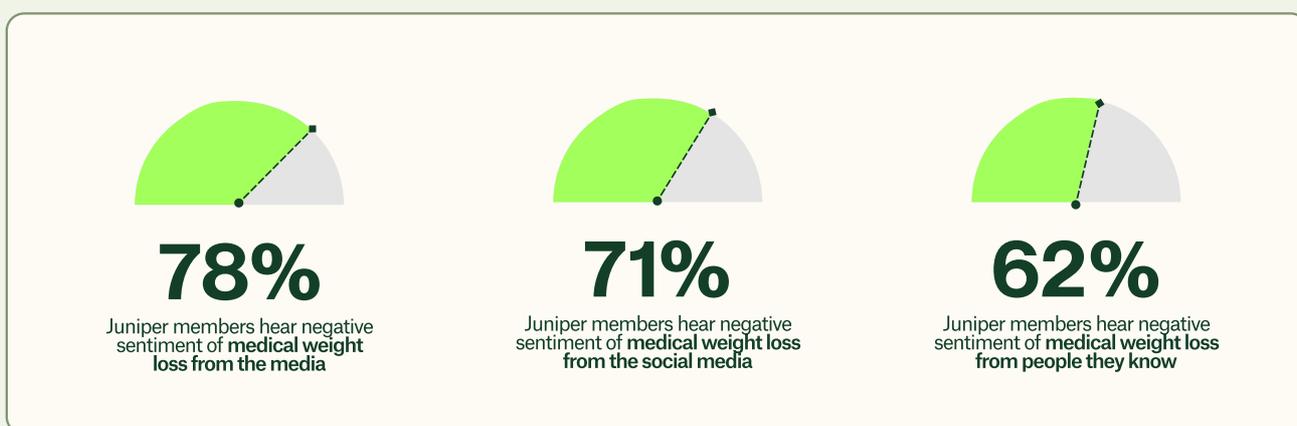


Of those Australian members who have hidden their medical treatment usage, **41% cite shame as a reason, demonstrating the impact of stigma - and the shame it creates - on patient behaviour. This is only exceeded by privacy, which is cited by 47% of respondents.**

## RAMPANT NEGATIVITY

It is unsurprising that so many choose to hide their use of medical weight loss treatments, given the critical voices that are rampant in our society.

A massive 78% of Juniper members have heard negative sentiment about medical weight loss from the media, 71% have heard negative sentiment about medical weight loss from social media, and 62% have heard negative sentiment about medical weight loss from people they know.



This is the brutal reality of taking medical treatment for a disease recognised by the WHO. Constant negativity drives shame in relation to using medical treatment, and creates a pressure to hide the use of treatment.

## THE RISK OF STIGMA

This culture of shame and judgement not only impacts people's ability to manage their weight and health, it can cost lives.

**Results from a 2025 Juniper report <sup>[14]</sup> found 39% of women would feel more comfortable choosing medical weight loss treatment if there were no stigma attached.**

[14]Juniper, (n.d.). Reclaim the Narrative. Juniper (website)

This increased to 48% among the cohort with a BMI over 27, which is classified as overweight. Given excess weight is now the leading modifiable risk factor for ill health in Australia, this has significant implications for the health and wellbeing of Australian women.<sup>[15]</sup>

It's not just weight management where this is an issue.

When discussing clinical practice recommendations regarding medical weight loss patients prior to anaesthesia or sedation, **Professor David Story, president of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists, said patients were showing up for surgery without telling doctors they were on medical weight loss treatment, partly because they were embarrassed about using treatment. This lack of medical disclosure can lead to “life-threatening” consequences.**<sup>[16]</sup>

[15] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), (2024). 'Living with overweight or obesity overtakes tobacco as new leading burden of disease risk factor', Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (website).

[16] ABC News, (2025). Doctors delay surgery for some patients due to concerns about pre-operative medical weight loss use and increased risk of pulmonary aspiration. ABC News (website).



## CASE STUDY

# Leanne Hughes

**Leanne Hughes, 46, is a deputy principal and mum of three. Like many women, she lives a busy life, juggling a packed schedule of school leadership, kids' sport and a vibrant family life.**

She says the stigma around medical weight loss isn't subtle, it's deeply ingrained in Australian culture - it shows up in what people say, what they assume, and what they feel entitled to judge.

"I've got a full life, a job where people know me, and a community where everyone knows everyone.

"The judgement can be real. People act like needing medical support says something about your character, not your health.

"So you stay quiet. You keep it to yourself. But when people feel they have to hide, that's when stigma wins - and it keeps the whole conversation stuck."

# Ending Australia's last taboo

We're calling on Australia to shed the weight of stigma, because shame has no place in healthcare.

It's time to shift conversations and attitudes about medical weight loss from moral judgement to medical facts, destigmatise seeking care for weight management, and empower people to speak up about their lived experiences.

Because nobody should have to live beneath the weight of shame.

