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March 26, 2018

Ms. Mindy Grossman
Chief Executive Officer
Weight Watchers International
675 Avenue of the Americas
6th Floor
New York, NY 10010

Dear Ms. Grossman,

As eating disorder clinicians, researchers, and advocates, we at the Academy for Eating Disorders would like to discuss our concerns about Weight Watchers' recent decision to offer free membership to teenagers.

We are primarily concerned about the targeted efforts to market a diet plan to teens. This could increase their vulnerability to dangerous disordered eating.

Research has identified dieting during adolescence as a significant risk factor in the development of potentially life-threatening eating disorders (Golden et al., 2016; Stice et al., 2017). In addition, it leads to preoccupation with food, weight, and body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction is associated with decreased quality of life among adolescents (Griffiths et al., 2017). Further, studies indicate that dieting can result in weight *gain* and increased rates of binge eating among adolescents (Field et al., 2003; Mann et al., 2007). The dangers associated with dieting are not limited to eating pathology, as dieting has also been implicated in physical health consequences such as nutritional deficiencies, menstrual irregularity, and osteopenia, and psychological consequences, such as food preoccupation, irritability, depression, and fatigue (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2004; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006; Stice, 2002). These outcomes are at odds with Weight Watchers' reported goal of improving the well-being of its members.

Although Weight Watchers encourages flexibility in the approach to dieting, individuals are still encouraged to monitor food intake by counting points, instead of eating based on hunger and satiety cues. This is particularly concerning in an adolescent population, as research has demonstrated a lower risk for disordered eating among young adults who rely on hunger and satiety cues to regulate eating (Denny et al., 2013). Thus, initiating dieting behaviors through Weight Watchers during adolescence may inadvertently encourage teens to develop unhealthy eating habits, and possibly the development of an eating disorder.

Weight Watchers stocks jumped 16% after the announcement to offer free membership to teens, suggesting that many people think this initiative is a good idea. However, this may be based on reasons other than a well-informed review of the scientific research. We believe that many parents may consent to enroll their children in the Weight Watchers program, not realizing the

potentially devastating consequences this choice may have on their children's future well-being.

Given its position in our society, Weight Watchers and Oprah have the opportunity to promote health and wellness for all. However, given the robust scientific literature indicating the negative effects of adolescent dieting, we firmly believe that promoting dieting among teens, although it may be well-intentioned, is ultimately misguided. Our position is not in isolation, as the dangers and ineffectiveness of dieting have been highlighted in an open letter endorsed by the Academy for Eating Disorders, Project HEAL, and other prominent leaders in the field of eating disorders: <https://www.refinery29.com/2018/02/190857/dieting-health-losing-weight-watchers>.

We thus urge you to reconsider the decision to market Weight Watchers to adolescents and evaluate the negative impact this could have on millions of vulnerable teens. We are enthusiastic about the possibility of creating an open dialogue to discuss our shared goal of health and wellness for every individual. As written in your impact manifesto, "Not every company has the opportunity to impact the lives of millions. We do." Please use this opportunity responsibly.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Bauer, PhD
President

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