



## World Obesity's Financial Relationship Policy

### About World Obesity

The World Obesity Federation is an association of more than 50 national and regional organisations concerned with obesity, representing scientific, medical and research communities. The mission of World Obesity is to lead and drive global efforts to reduce, prevent and treat obesity.

As an organisation, World Obesity values evidence informed by the best available knowledge, engages in collaborations to increase our impact, and encourages innovation and research.

World Obesity's goals include:

- To collect, conduct and disseminate world-leading research
- To influence policy and practices of actors at different levels
- To bring rigor, consistency and credibility to the field through high standards of training, education, publications and conferences
- To create a global community dedicated to solving obesity

### The purpose of this document

In order to achieve its mission and goals, World Obesity engages with other organisations working on obesity and related issues. This engagement may involve financial support, and our financial relationship policy helps us to assess the appropriateness of the engagements and to ensure our credibility and reputation are maintained and our efforts to achieve our goals and mission are strengthened.

The Financial Relationship Policy described here governs our financial relationships with private sector organisations. As a UK-registered charity, we acknowledge the UK Charity Commission's recommendations that charities should have clear financial relationship policies that are defensible, accountable and transparent. Our policy aims to fulfil these criteria, to manage potential conflicts of interest, and to implement our trustees' responsibilities to protect World Obesity's reputation and maintain World Obesity's international standing on issues related to obesity prevention and weight management.

It should be noted that the World Obesity Federation has no legal control over the activities of its member organisations or the individual members of those organisations.

## Background

World Obesity's member organisations have experienced potential reputational damage due to perceived conflicts of interests: this includes accusations of bias as a result of receiving funding from the pharmaceutical industry<sup>1</sup> and criticism for receiving support from infant formula, snack food and soft drinks companies. Furthermore, we are aware of the evidence that the sources of funding can influence scientific programmes, research results and organisational policy position.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Close relations with bodies that have financial interests in conflict with our goals and positions can damage our good standing with other public health organisations and with government bodies and international agencies (such as the World Health Organization). The governmental agencies we work with recognise the issue: for example the World Health Organization does not accept funding from food and beverage manufacturers for work on NCD prevention and control because of the potential conflict of interests.<sup>5</sup>

In order to minimise the potential harms, World Obesity has adopted a process of risk evaluation and risk management concerning decisions on financial relationships, described here.

## Process to govern financial relationships

In order to undertake a risk assessment of a proposed engagement, two dimensions are addressed. Firstly we consider the type of engagement which might be entered into, as some types of engagement may expose World Obesity to less risk than others. Secondly we consider the nature of the private sector organisation with whom we are considering an engagement.

### Engagement type

The potential opportunities for World Obesity's engagement with private sector companies are listed in table 1. These are grouped by risk into three categories:

- High risk (generally an engagement for an extended period of time or involving a significant level of core activities)
- Medium risk (less extended duration or smaller contribution to core activities)
- Low risk (short term or minor contribution to core activities)

These categories are kept under review and may change over time.

### Organisation type

Organisations differ in their likely level of conflict of interest, and hence in their potential risk. For ethical reasons and in compliance with UK charity regulations, World Obesity does

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<sup>1</sup> Obesity task force linked to WHO takes "millions" from drug firms. *BMJ* 2006; 332:1412.2. See <http://www.bmj.com/content/332/7555/1412.2>

<sup>2</sup> Nestle M (2008) *Food Politics: How the Food Industry Influences Nutrition and Health*. University of California Press; See also Roberts I (2008) Corporate capture and Coca-Cola. *Lancet*. 372(9654):1934-5.

<sup>3</sup> Bekelman et al (2003) Scope and impact of financial conflicts of interest in biomedical research: a systematic review. *JAMA* 289(4):454-65.

<sup>4</sup> Bhandari et al (2004) Association between industry funding and statistically significant pro-industry findings in medical and surgical randomized trials. *CMAJ*.;170(4):477-80.

<sup>5</sup> 'WHO sets the record straight on work with the food and beverage industry.' Geneva, WHO, 19 November 2012. See [http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2012/nutrition\\_20121119/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2012/nutrition_20121119/en/index.html)

not consider entering into financial relationships with organisations closely linked to the active promotion of:

tobacco products, armaments, gambling, alcohol products, or political parties.

Table 2 shows organisations grouped into three categories: Tier 1 (higher risk), Tier 2 (medium risk) and Tier 3 (lower risk). These categorises are kept under review and may change over time.

#### Policy alignment assessment (PAA)

For some forms of engagement with some types of organisation a policy alignment assessment is undertaken. This statement indicates the organisation's compliance with World Obesity's positions on obesity treatment and prevention. Compliance with treatment positions may include an assessment of the evidence base for pharmaceutical and weight loss products. Compliance with prevention positions may include an assessment of support for the World Health Organization's recommendations for tackling non-communicable disease and other public health actions and strategies.

#### Corporate Engagement Committee assessment (CECA)

For some forms of engagement with some types of organisation, an assessment may be requested from the chairs and their nominated members of World Obesity's *Clinical Care Committee* and *Policy and Prevention Committee*.

#### Decision process

A decision process is undertaken for each potential relationship. In brief, for those organisations or activities considered to constitute a risk, a policy alignment assessment and committee assessment will be required, and the results of these are considered by World Obesity's Executive Director, who may consult with the Executive Committee in order to make a decision. The need for a policy alignment assessment and for a committee assessment is indicated in Tables 1 and 2. These are then reviewed by the Chief Executive who may further consult with staff, trustees and committee members before making a decision.

It is our policy to be transparent in this process, and we place a summary of our policy alignment assessments and committee assessments in the public domain, along with the Executive Director's decision.

Table 1 Risk matrix determining actions required for World Obesity engagement

Type of engagement	Organisations in Tier 1	Organisations in Tier 2	Organisations in Tier 3
<p><b>High risk</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial contribution worth over £100,000 in cash or kind, over a period of one year or less, <b>or</b></li> <li>Collaboration in a joint project extending more than one year</li> </ul>	PAA <i>and</i> CECA before decision by CEO	PAA <i>and</i> CECA before decision by CEO	PAA before decision by CEO
<p><b>Medium risk</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial contributions worth between £10,000 and £100,000 in cash or kind, <i>including conference sponsorships, satellites, exhibitions, other fees, consultancies, salaries, property, rent</i></li> <li>Investments held by World Obesity funds worth over £10,000 capital or £500 p.a. dividend or interest</li> </ul>	PAA <i>and</i> CECA before decision by CEO	PAA before decision by CEO	Decision by CEO
<p><b>Low risk</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial contributions worth up to £10,000 in cash or kind</li> <li>Investments held by World Obesity smaller than specified above.</li> </ul>	PAA before decision by CEO	Decision by CEO	Decision by CEO

**Table 2 Categories of organisations**

*If in doubt, assume a higher risk category.*

Tier	Risk	Industry sectors
Tier 1	High	<p>Food manufacturers (and their peak bodies, federations, councils) with interests in promoting products in the following categories: soft drinks, snack foods, baby foods and milks, breakfast cereals, cookies and cakes, confectionery, desserts, and sugar-related commodities.</p> <p>Caterers and fast-service restaurants with more than 5 outlets</p> <p>Producers of pharmaceutical and weight management services and products (including meal replacement products).</p>
Tier 2	Medium	<p>Food manufacturers (and their peak bodies, councils and federations) promoting other products, including additives and artificial sweeteners, fruit and vegetable products, meat fish and dairy products.</p> <p>Food retailers.</p> <p>Caterers with 5 or fewer outlets, catering suppliers.</p> <p>Automobile industry, road building industry, automobile fuel companies.</p> <p>Broadcasters and audio-visual media companies, TV programme makers, TV, computer and video games manufacturers and distributors.</p> <p>Medical equipment manufacturers and suppliers, fitness clubs, private health service providers, health insurance companies</p> <p>Marketing and public relations companies.</p> <p>Civil society organisations (including academic and professional bodies, non-profit organisations, charities and philanthropic bodies) which are more than 20% funded by one or more Tier 1 organisations.</p>
Tier 3	Low	<p>Sports and bicycle companies, mass transport companies, tourism and hotels, domestic energy and water companies, construction industry excluding road building), banking and non-health-related insurance industries, electronics companies (non-TV), music industry, publishers.</p> <p>Public authorities and government agencies.</p> <p>Civil society organisations (specified above) less than 20% funded by Tier 1 organisations.</p>

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## World Obesity financial policy

### Information for external organisations

Thank you for your interest in engaging with World Obesity, whether through collaboration or sponsorship. In order to protect our organisation from any reputational damage or other form of risk as a result of our engagement, we have established a financial policy which includes a risk assessment process.

This risk assessment considers both the type of engagement and the nature of your organisation's operations. The current versions of these are shown in the Annex.

It is anticipated that our risk assessment process will use information from your company website and other sources. In some instances further information may be required to make an assessment, particularly if your website is not in English, and we may approach you to help us fulfil our assessment.

If our assessment indicates that the risk is too high for our organisation to proceed with a financial relationship, the reasons for this decision will be communicated to you.

In the interests of transparency, our assessments and decisions are posted on our website for open access.

Further details of our risk assessment process are available on our website here:

<http://www.worldobesity.org/xxxx>