

Let's Talk: Diabetes Stigma in Marketing

Diabetes stigma refers to negative social judgments, stereotypes, and prejudices about diabetes, or about a person due to their diabetes.¹ Research shows that people who experience stigma also experience worse mental, physical, and social health outcomes.¹

4 ways to frame conversations about diabetes

As marketing and communications professionals, you have the **ability to shape the way people talk about and perceive those living with diabetes through framing**. Framing refers to the choices we make about how to explain an issue or problem.² It's what we choose to emphasize, and what we say (or don't say).

Our prevailing cultural narrative portrays diabetes as a simple disease caused by "bad" or "lazy" personal health choices. By effectively framing diabetes and choosing words and phrases that are accurate, respectful, and empowering, you can help dismantle these underlying cultural narratives that contribute to diabetes stigma. Here are four framing tips to help you reduce diabetes stigma and communicate more effectively:

1 Make sure diabetes portrayals in media are accurate, respectful, and diverse.³

The way diabetes is currently represented on screen is often inaccurate, overly simplified, or based on stereotypes about what someone with diabetes looks like and how they manage (or don't manage) their condition. By choosing accurate portrayals of diabetes that highlight each person's unique experiences, you can help raise awareness among the general public, normalize diabetes management, and clear up damaging misconceptions.

3 Start with what you want people to know about diabetes instead of repeating damaging myths.²

When you list myths or frequently used stigmatizing or inaccurate statements in a "myth-busting" approach, it amplifies harmful narratives. People often remember the first thing they read or hear (the myth), but not the corrected information shared afterward. Instead, lead with the accurate, respectful, and empowering information you want people to remember to make a lasting impression.

2 Avoid using fear-based and crisis messaging.²

These forms of messaging, commonly used as appeals to emotion in marketing, aim to convey the severity of an issue but often lead to a sense of distress, overwhelm, or fatalism. Instead, talk about how we can address diabetes together. Convey urgency while empowering people with concrete solutions.

4 Talk about what we all need to be healthy while still acknowledging people's specific needs.²

People with diabetes also face significant challenges beyond the demands of managing their condition, such as navigating stigma and judgment from others. When we use messages that emphasize what we all need to have good health – like high-quality preventative healthcare, access to safe and exercise-friendly outdoor spaces, and healthy affordable food choices – we divert thinking away from individual blame and toward our common experiences.



It takes **all of us** to end diabetes stigma.

Make a difference by choosing stigma-free language:

Diabetes stigma can negatively impact mental health and care outcomes. The words and phrases we use when talking about diabetes in marketing and communications can have an outsized impact. You can positively transform these conversations by **choosing language that:**

- ✓ is neutral, nonjudgmental, and based on facts, actions, or physiology/biology^{4,5}
- ✓ is strengths-based, respectful, inclusive, and imparts hope^{4,5}
- ✓ is person-centered^{4,5}
- ✓ fosters collaboration between people with diabetes and their support networks^{4,5}

The first step to addressing diabetes stigma is to understand what it is and how it affects people. Visit the dStigmatize Resource Library at [dstigmatize.org/resources](https://www.dstigmatize.org/resources) to learn more.



Join the movement: sign the **Pledge to End Diabetes Stigma.**

Citations:

1. Speight, J., Holmes-Truscott, E., Garza, M., Scibilia, R., Wagner, S., Kato, A., ... Skinner, T.C. (2024). Bringing an end to diabetes stigma and discrimination: an international consensus statement on evidence and recommendations. *The Lancet Diabetes & endocrinology*, 12(1), 61-82.
2. FrameWorks Institute. (2020). *Education is at a Crossroads*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.
3. The diaTribe Foundation, Beyond Type 1. (2022). *A Guide to the Portrayal of Diabetes in Film and Television*. dStigmatize resource Library. Retrieved on March 13, 2025 from <https://www.dstigmatize.org/resources/a-guide-to-the-portrayal-of-diabetes-in-film-and-television/>
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5. J, S., T C S., T D., T B., G K., C L., R S., & G, J. (2021). Our language matters: Improving communication with and about people with diabetes. A position statement by Diabetes Australia. *Diabetes research and clinical practice*, 173, 108655