

# Weight Stigma & Discrimination:

## An Equity Framework Approach to Chart Needed Action

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**Boston  
Children's  
Hospital**

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Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders

**I have no disclosures**



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## What is health equity?

“Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires **removing obstacles to health** such as...”



“

## What is health equity?

“...poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.”

# Kumanyika's Equity-Oriented Prevention Framework



Kumanyika  
2019; 2017

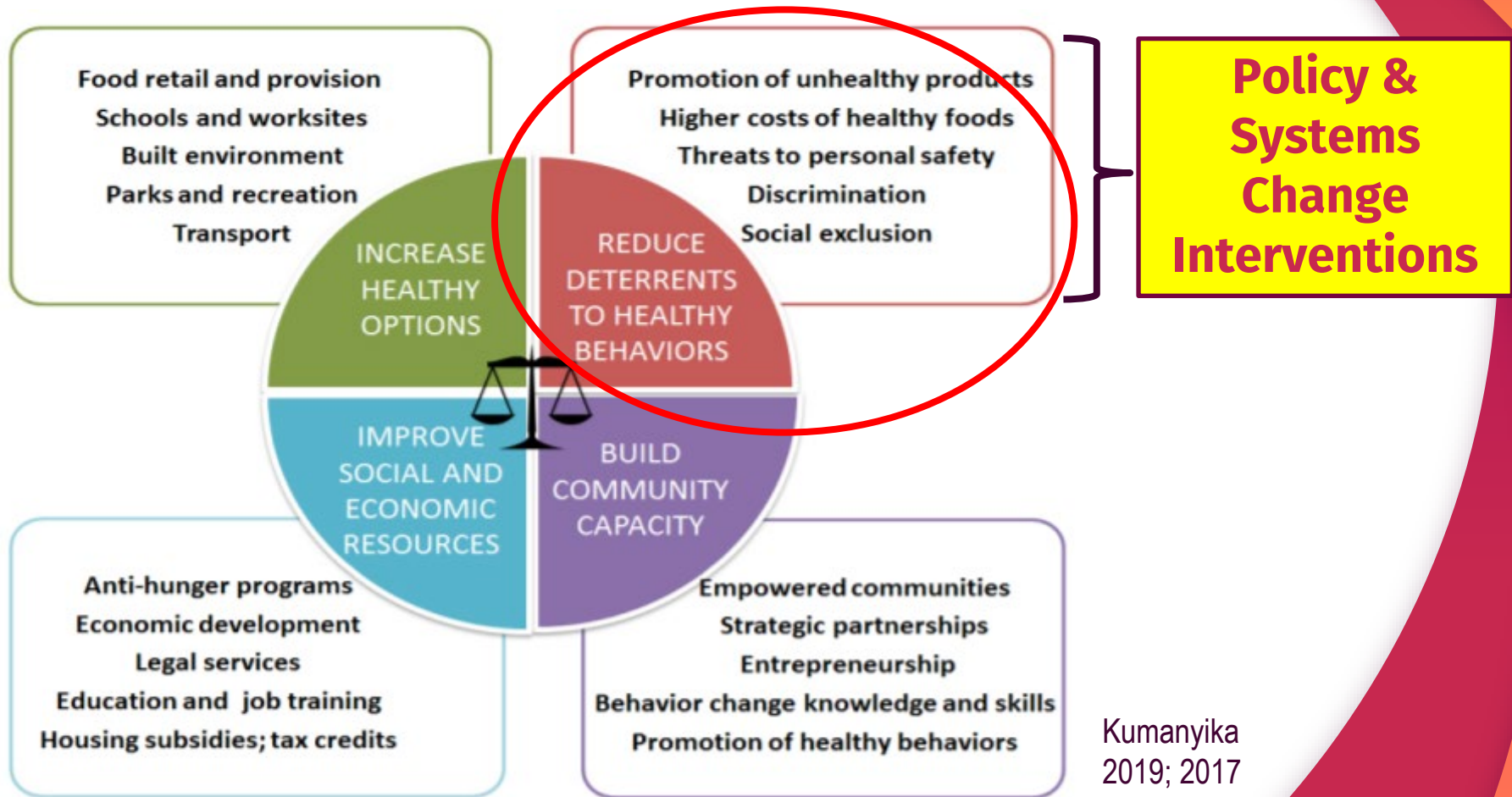
# Kumanyika's Equity-Oriented Prevention Framework



**Goal of Framework:**  
Guide selection of interventions to reduce disadvantage, improve equity

Kumanyika  
2019; 2017

# Kumanyika's Equity-Oriented Prevention Framework



Kumanyika  
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# Kumanyika's Equity-Oriented Prevention Framework

## Policy & Systems Change Interventions

Promotion of unhealthy products

Higher costs of healthy foods

Threats to personal safety

Discrimination

Social exclusion

REDUCE  
DETERRENTS  
TO HEALTHY  
BEHAVIORS

**Strong, consistent evidence that weight stigma & discrimination are threats to health equity for people living in larger bodies**

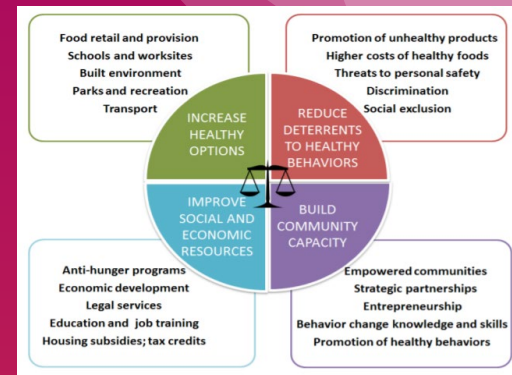
Kumanyika  
2019; 2017

*Equity problem:*

**Discrimination, social exclusion**

*Equity solution:*

**Ban weight discrimination**



Widespread legal weight discrimination is obstacle to basic rights & health.

10



## Businessweek + Equality

# Yes, You Can Still Be Fired for Being Fat

Weight-based discrimination costs some Americans their jobs. Bills in New York and Massachusetts could expand protections to tens of millions of people.

By Josh Eidelson

March 15, 2022, 4:00 AM EDT

<https://bloom.bg/3CNh4RN>



# Weight Discrimination Widespread, Worsens Health Iniquities

- Stigma = Disparaging associations of negative personal characteristics w/ larger bodies
- Discrimination well-documented in:
  - Employment
  - Education
  - Healthcare & public health
  - Public settings & more

# Weight Discrimination Widespread, Worsens Health Inequities

- Experiences of discrimination linked to:
  - Lower earning, less likely to be hired or promoted, more likely to be fired

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  - Lower subjective ratings from teachers & college admissions
  - Inaccessible public settings & social isolation
  - Depression, anxiety, eating disorders, harmful physiological impacts of stress/allostatic load

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## Report: The social & economic cost of weight discrimination for US society

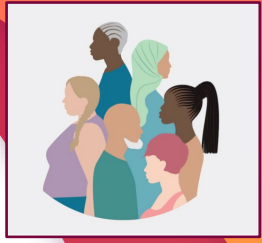
**Deloitte.**  
Access Economics



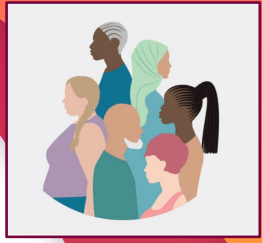
<http://bit.ly/42KPiC8>



**Total US Annual Economic Costs Due to  
Weight Discrimination, 2019: \$200B/year**



# Total US Annual Economic Costs Due to Weight Discrimination, 2019: \$200B/year



Cost Component

Other Costs: \$10.8B

Employment  
Losses: \$45.3B

Wage Losses:  
\$73.7B

Health System: \$18.5B

Productivity  
Losses: \$51.5B

- Health System
- Productivity Losses
- Wage Losses
- Employment Losses
- Other Costs

**Total: \$200B**



Plus loss of wellbeing costs: \$207B/year

<https://http://bit.ly/42KPiC8>

# **Some Progress Against Discrimination...**

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**12.3 million**

US residents in areas with  
weight anti-discrimination law.

US Population



■ Law    Court Ruling    No Protection

# Some Progress Against Discrimination...

**12.3 million**

US residents in areas with weight anti-discrimination law.

**1.9 million**

US residents in area with protection by court ruling.

US Population



■ Law ■ Judicial Ruling ■ No Protection

# ...But Still A Lot More Work to Be Done

**12.3 million**

US residents in areas with weight anti-discrimination law.

**1.9 million**

US residents in area with protection by court ruling.

**95.7%**

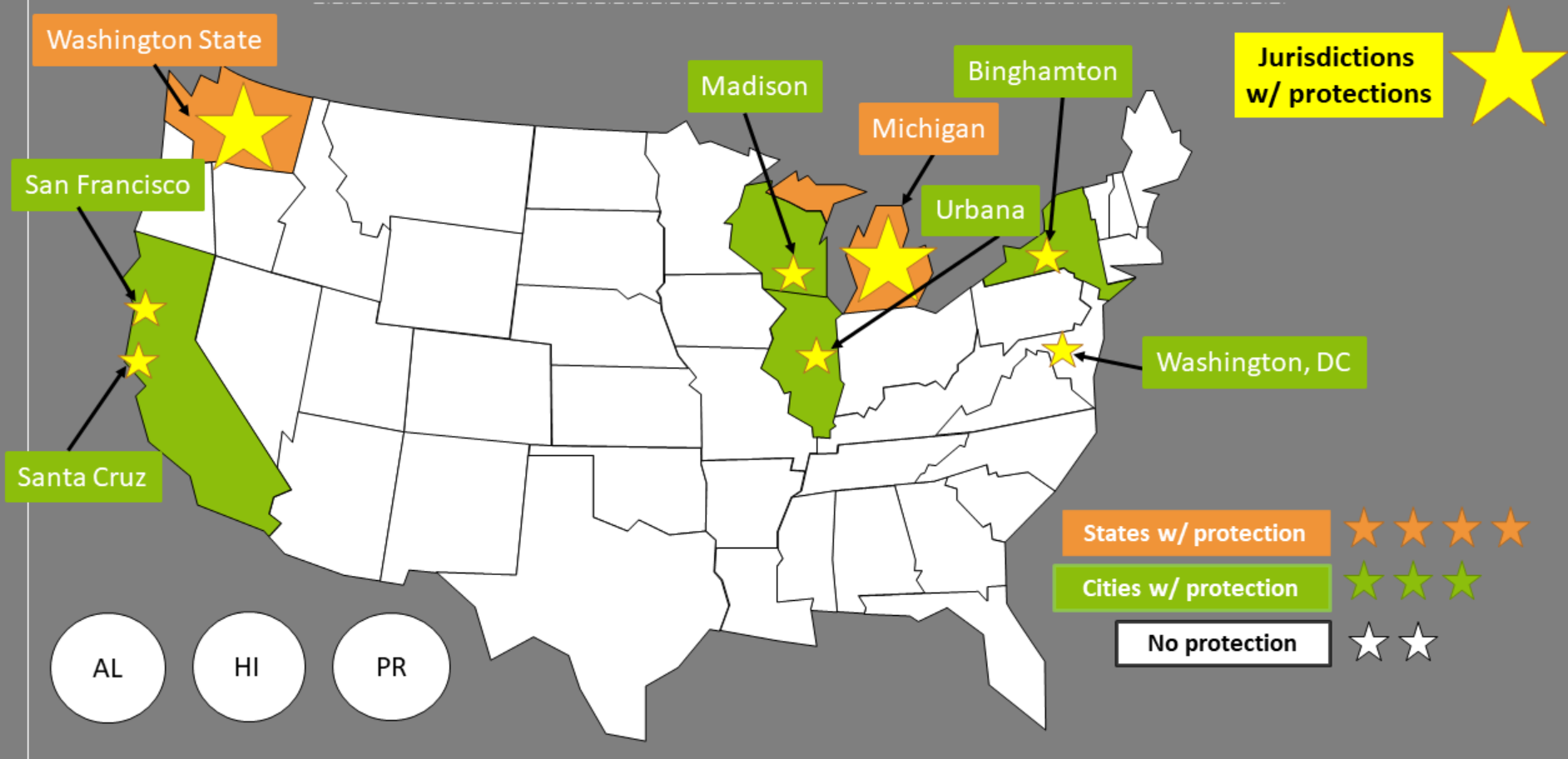
Greater than 95% of US residents live in areas with ***NO PROTECTION*** against weight discrimination.

US Population



■ Law ■ Court Ruling ■ No Protection

# US Jurisdictions That Protect Against Weight Discrimination



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“Without laws to prohibit weight discrimination, **people will continue to be unfairly fired, suspended, or demoted because of their weight – even if they demonstrate good job performance and even if body weight is unrelated to their job responsibilities.**”

– Rudd Center, Weight Bias: A Policy Brief, 2017

# National Advocacy Campaign to Ban Body Size Discrimination in US States

campaign for  
**size**   
**freedom**

Because every body  
deserves the freedom  
to thrive.

## EVERY BODY DESERVES THE FREEDOM TO THRIVE



**FLARE**

Fat Legal Advocacy,  
Rights, & Education

a project of the Law Office  
of Brandie Solovay



Sign the Petition

<http://naafa.org/sizefreedom>

# Bill to Ban Body Size Discrimination in MA Legislature

HOUSE DOCKET, NO. 626

FILED ON: 1/14/2023

## HOUSE . . . . . No. 1705

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

*Tram T. Nguyen*



**MA Sen. Rausch**



**MA Rep. Nguyen**

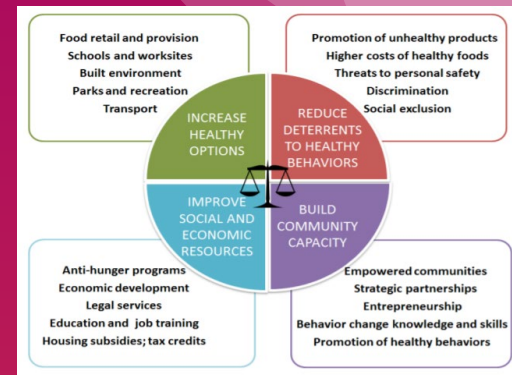
To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

**An Act prohibiting body size discrimination.**

*Equity problem:*  
**Threats to personal safety**

*Equity solution:*  
**Eliminate barriers to care**



# Kumanyika's Equity-Oriented Prevention Framework

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# Eliminate Barriers to Care

Identifying & mitigating barriers to care within healthcare system will be critical to improving access and quality of care for people with higher weight.



# Easy to Agree

Identifying & mitigating barriers to care within healthcare system will be critical to improving access and quality of care for people with higher weight.



# Not So Easy to Agree

What are these barriers and how do we mitigate them?



# Universal Weighing?

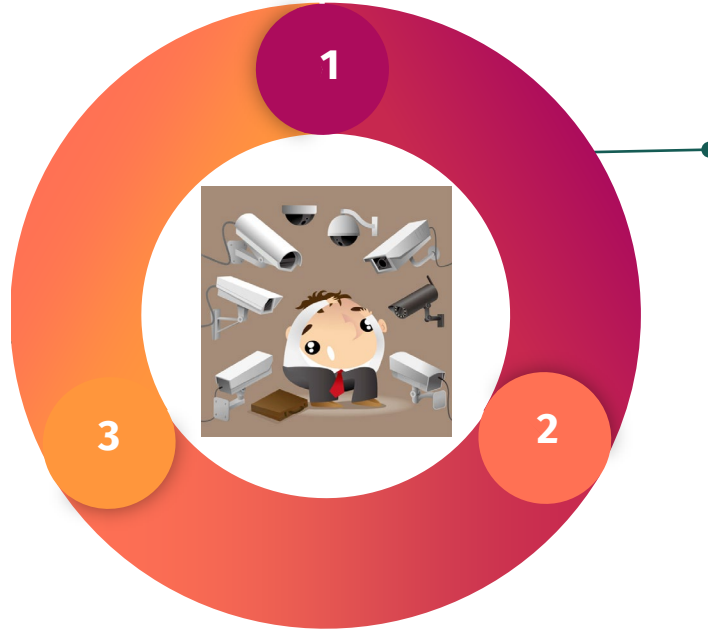
Could this be a barrier to care?

What do we know so far?



# Universal Weighing = Routine Weight/BMI Surveillance

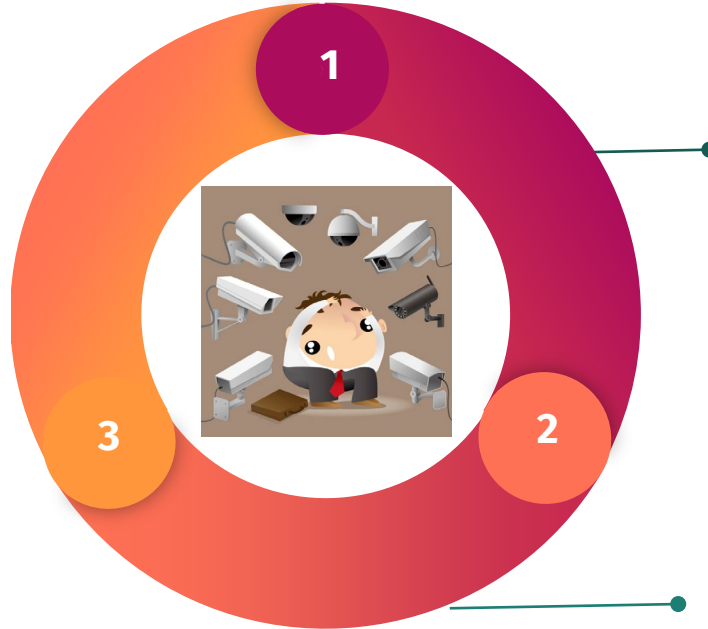
# Weighing/BMI assessment ubiquitous



## 1) Healthcare

- Routine in primary care, promoted by USPSTF, CDC
- Incentized by payers, built into EHR platforms
- Thresholds for care access
- Widespread public health promotion, research in all settings

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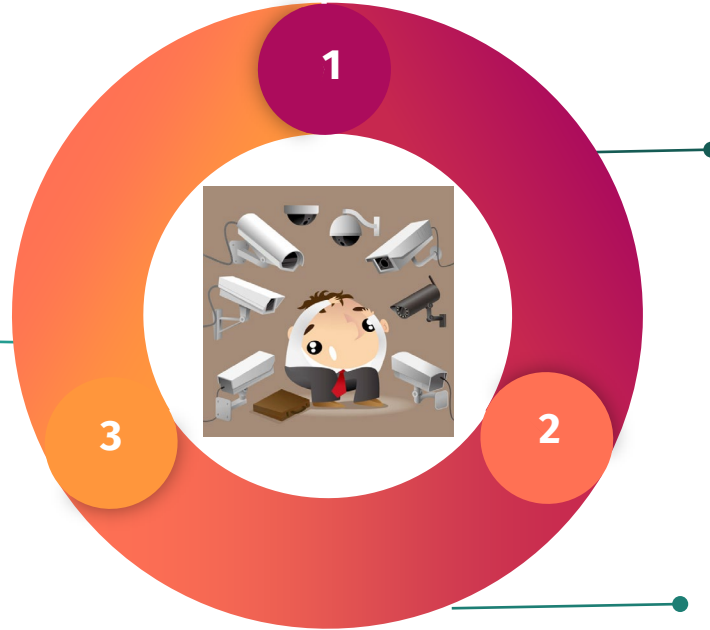
## 2) Online, Digital Apps

- “Wellness,” dieting industries food, clothing, etc.
- Sell products, boost attention, extend time online for ad revenue for platforms

# Weighing/BMI assessment ubiquitous

## 3) School, Work, Athletics

- School-based screening
- Employment thresholds in military, etc.
  - Athletic competition thresholds



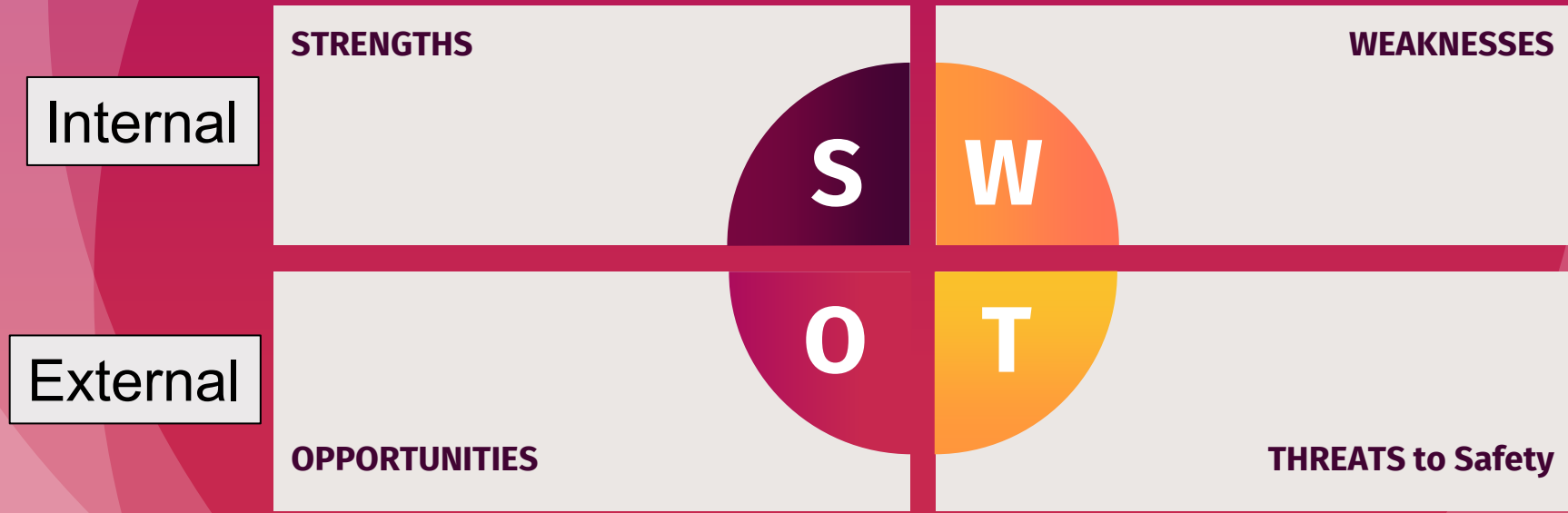
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# What might *SWOT Analysis* of universal weighing tell us?

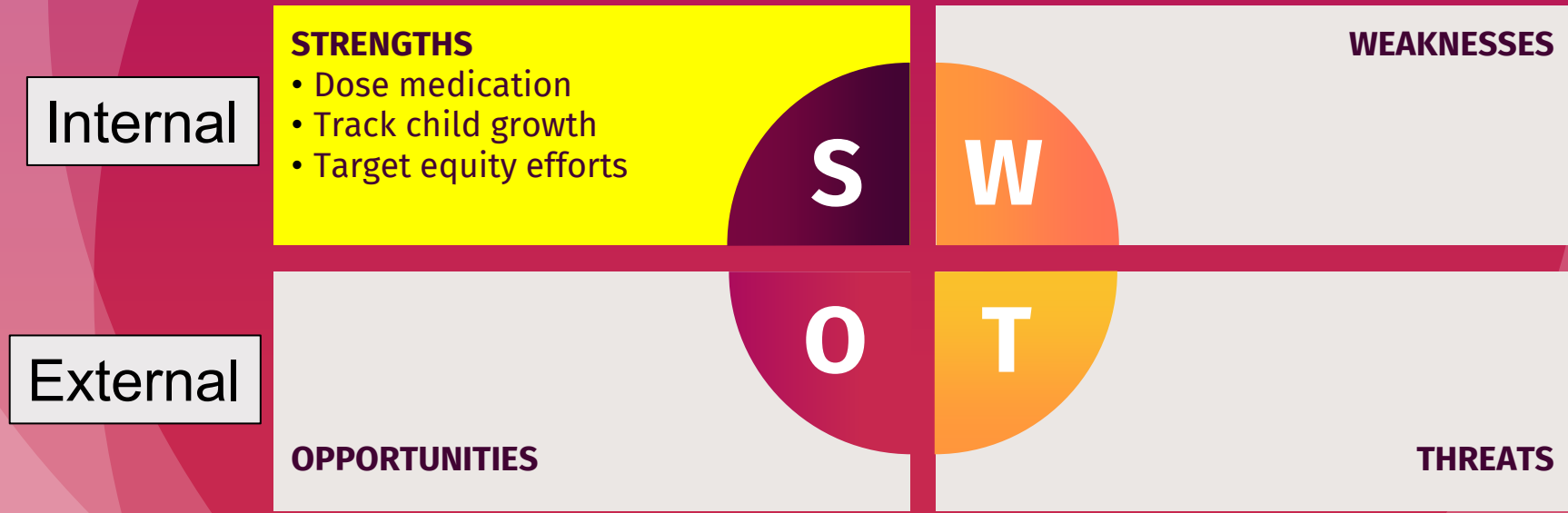


<b>STRENGTHS</b> Blue is the colour of the clear sky and the deep sea	<b>S</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b> Yellow is the color of gold, butter and ripe lemons
Black is the color of ebony and of outer space <b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>O</b>	<b>T</b>	White is the color of milk and fresh snow <b>THREATS</b>

# SWOT Analysis Widely Used in Healthcare, Public Health, Business

- **SWOT** = **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, **T**hreats
  - Both internal and external to a program
  - Systematic process to assess factors that help or harm a project, undermine or promote chances of success

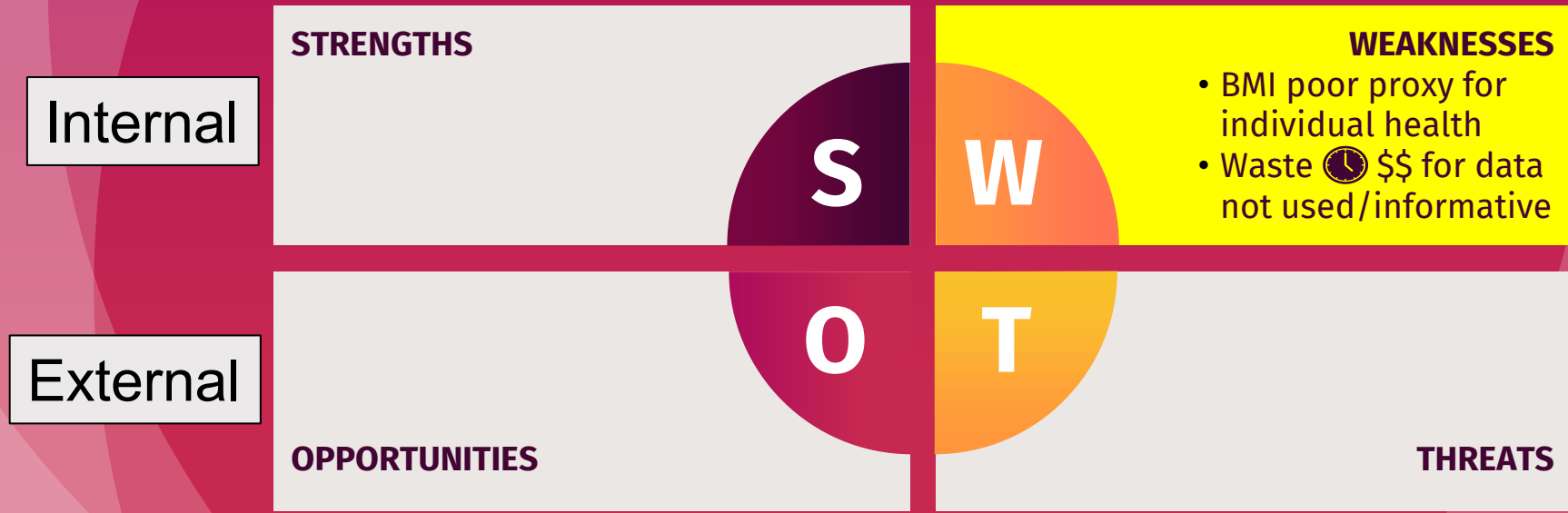
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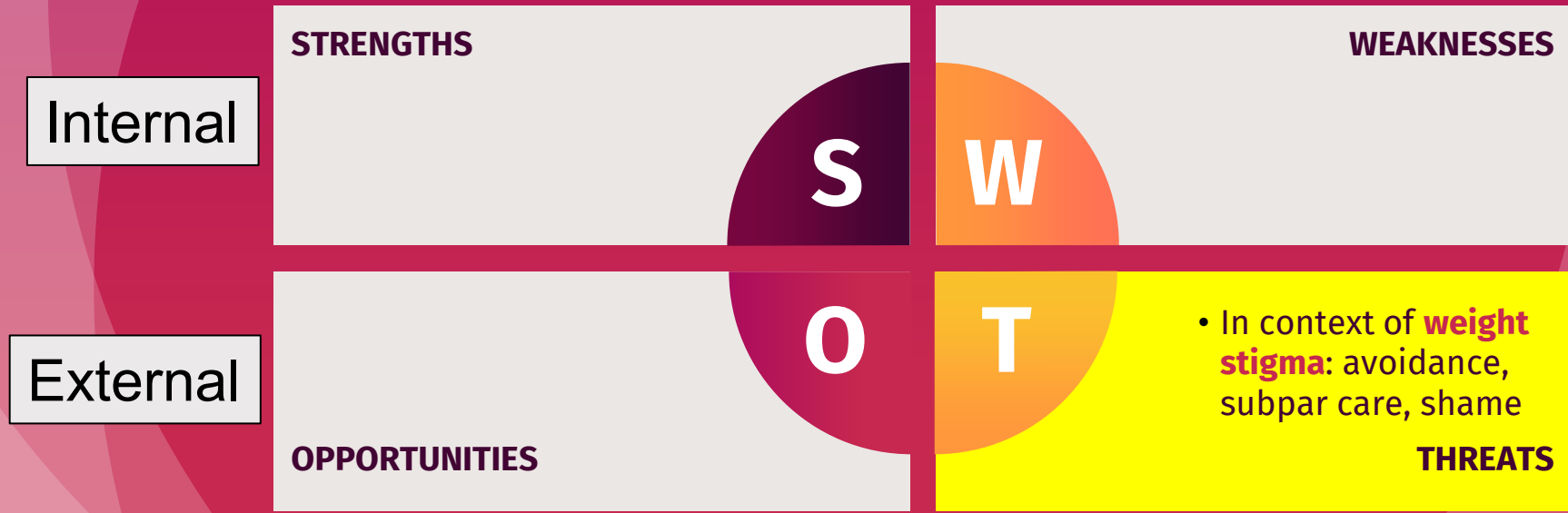
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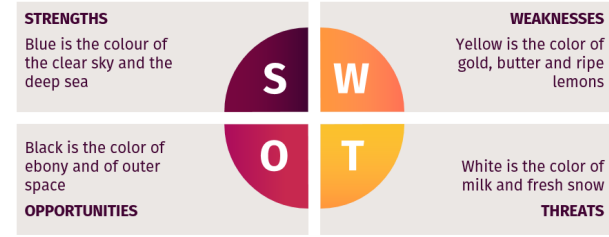


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“I had good insurance and plenty of doctors nearby. I had all the access I needed. But there was just one problem: I was fat, and I **couldn't seem to find a doctor** who would take my symptoms seriously. So, **for the better part of a decade**, I abandoned the medical care that had long since abandoned me.”

– Your Fat Friend/Aubrey Gordon, *Self Magazine* (2018)

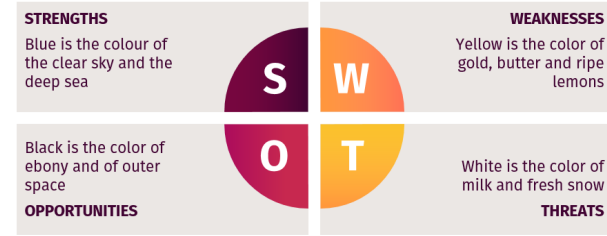
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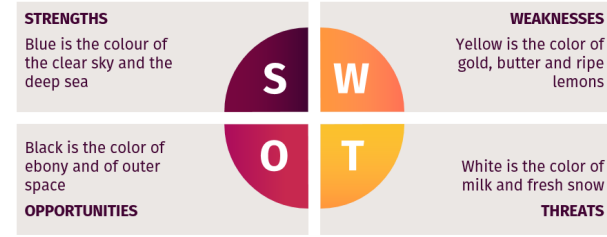


# What Can You Do?

## Conduct Your Own **SWOT** Analysis

- Where, how & why do you require or encourage routine weighing?
  - Could this be *a **barrier*** to care or stigmatizing?

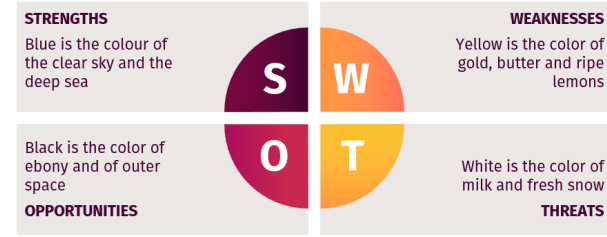




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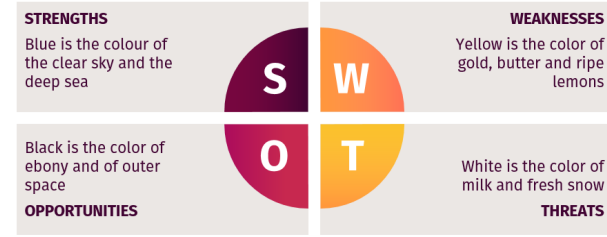
- How might these practices disproportionately burden BIPOC, low income & other minoritized communities receiving care ***via public systems?***
  - What are ***equity costs*** of excessive surveillance?



# What Can You Do?

## Conduct Your Own **SWOT** Analysis

- Can you include in your SWOT analysis voices of community **w/lived experience** w/weight stigma?
  - Do your community advisors include ***these voices?***



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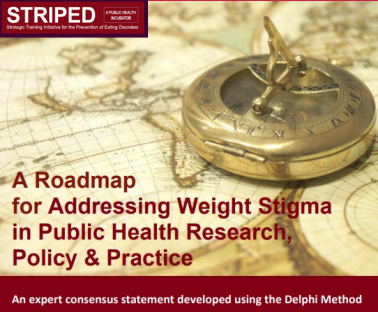
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  - Do your community advisors include ***these voices?***
- **SWOT Resources:**
  - Minnesota Dept. of Health: <https://bit.ly/2Z4Az9j>
  - AHRQ: <https://bit.ly/3psqSfg>

“

“ I delay weighing new patients so I can make sure doing so would **not cause harm**, like in the case of clients with eating disorders or a history of body shame.”

– Dr. Ana Paunovic, *Washington Post* (6/20/2018)



“  
“Research is mounting showing the pernicious effects of weight stigma on health. As public health professionals, our responsibility is to root out the practices and systems that perpetuate weight stigma.”

<https://bit.ly/3hoJlgW>

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# Thank you

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<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/striped>

