



July 29, 2025

To: Meta Oversight Board  
RE: Public Comment Portal Submission for Eating Disorders Awareness Posts  
From: Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action

Dear Oversight Board:

On behalf of the Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action (EDC), thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment related to “Eating Disorders Awareness Posts” to further educate Meta’s platforms on this mental health condition and mitigate potential harms. The EDC has provided information on two main queries including 1) enforcement challenges in distinguishing between harmful and recovery-oriented content, and 2) research on the effects of sharing or receiving eating disorder related information and support on social media.

The EDC is a nonprofit organization comprised of patient and caregiver advocates, treatment providers, advocacy organizations, and academics, aimed to advance the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. By promoting federal support for improved access to care, the EDC seeks to increase the resources available for education, prevention, and improved training, as well as for scientific research on etiology, prevention, and treatment of eating disorders.

## **I. Algorithmic Challenges and Enforcement Nuances**

A central concern is Meta’s reliance on automated systems to moderate eating disorder content. Algorithms frequently fail to differentiate between posts that promote eating disorders and those that support recovery. This results in the unnecessary removal of pro-recovery content and continued exposure to harmful, pro-eating disorder content.

We encourage the Oversight Board to visit our coalition members’ sites, National Alliance for Eating Disorders [Group Rules & Guidelines: Pro-Recovery](#) page and the National Eating Disorders Association [Guidelines for Media or Sharing Your Story](#) page to learn how our communities educate each other and the public on discussing eating disorders.

We urge Meta to prioritize human review for eating disorder-related posts. Human reviews, educated and trained to understand nuances of this mental health condition, are better equipped to make these distinctions.

## **II. Community Education and Peer Support**

There is limited and mixed research on the efficacy of individuals with eating disorders utilizing social media to support their recovery. Research has shown people may start and maintain eating disorder recovery accounts to keep themselves motivated and/or with the aim of helping others

and includes some combination of physical, behavioral, cognitive, and socio-relational changes.<sup>1</sup> Some research suggests online recovery communities offer positive support for people with eating disorders as they provide safe spaces for discussion and peer support.<sup>2,3</sup> These communities also appear helpful for individuals who are not yet willing to undergo treatment and can promote help-seeking and readiness to change.<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, image based platforms like Instagram can also foster unhealthy social comparison and amplify harmful content through algorithmic recommendations.<sup>5</sup> As one study participant shared:

*Those types of posts [showing bodies of people during their EDs] can keep you trapped because you're like, "Oh my gosh, well, I didn't look as sick as she looks, so I need to go back so that I can do recovery kind of, in a proper way."*<sup>6</sup>

Another respondent stated:

*There are some accounts that I came across that were very open about their eating disorders, and incredibly unhelpful...posting body checks of them at the lowest weight or even like, what weight they got to... that's when that competitive aspect of it came in, because it was like you never felt sick enough to be in this actual community.*<sup>7</sup>

These findings indicate that while recovery communities are beneficial, they can also expose users to triggering content, especially when algorithms surface both pro-recovery and pro-eating disorder material side by side.

Another respondent indicated that for those that are fully recovered, individuals feel less compelled to perform their recovery on the platform:

*I mean, when someone was actually recovered, they wouldn't be in the recovery community, they would say their goodbyes ... I guess that's kind of when you've hit actual recovery is when you're out of that community, and out into the real world, and Instagram is just kind of shoved to the side.*<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Nikolova, I., & LaMarre, A. (2023). If I Unfollow Them, It's Not a Dig at Them: A Narrative Analysis of Instagram Use in Eating Disorder Recovery. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 47(3), 387-401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843231166378>

<sup>2</sup> Kendal, S., Kirk, S., Elvey, R., Catchpole, R. and Prymachuk, S. (2017), How a moderated online discussion forum facilitates support for young people with eating disorders. *Health Expect*, 20: 98-111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.12439>

<sup>3</sup> McCormack, A. (2010). Individuals with eating disorders and the use of online support groups as a form of social support. *Computers, Informatics, Nursing*, 28(1), 12-19.

<sup>4</sup> Keski-Rahkonen, A., & Tozzi, F. (2005). The process of recovery in eating disorder sufferers' own words: An internet-based study. *The International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 37(Suppl), S80-S86. discussion S7-9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Nikolova, I., & LaMarre, A. (2023). If I Unfollow Them, It's Not a Dig at Them: A Narrative Analysis of Instagram Use in Eating Disorder Recovery. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 47(3), 387-401. <https://doi.org/10.1177/03616843231166378>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

### III. Algorithmic Recommendations and User Experience

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Research shows that many members of pro-recovery communities on Instagram meet clinical criteria for an eating disorder, making them especially vulnerable to the negative effects of image-based platforms.<sup>9</sup>

On the positive side, some studies have found that these online communities offer valuable counter-narratives, showcasing body diversity and a range of eating disorder experiences—including those that don't fit typical stereotypes.<sup>10</sup>

However, given the vulnerability of this community, Meta's algorithmic recommendation systems can exploit this demographic by promoting diet culture and harmful comparisons, even to users seeking recovery. As one research participant described:

*It's interesting because I have my kind of recovery and body positive pages, and so sometimes the algorithm gets confused and on the 'suggested posts' it's like talking about diets, so obviously it's just a robot, it doesn't understand the difference between a post saying that food does not have moral value and a post saying that carbs are bad for you.<sup>11</sup>*

Given these risks, we strongly recommend that Meta improve its algorithmic models to better identify and filter out harmful content, while prioritizing user safety and mental health. Meta should invest in training and resources for human reviewers to ensure content is managed responsibly across its platforms.

### IV. Advertising Misalignment

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Meta's current advertising protocols are inconsistent with community guidelines. For example, advertisements for GLP-1 medications have appeared alongside pro-recovery content, sometimes promoting unhealthy behaviors. For example, one recurring advertisement features a birthday cake with the following statement:

*PSA for the girls: you don't need to be obese to start a GLP-1.*

We recommend Meta review and align advertising policies with its community standards to mitigate the promotion of disordered eating behaviors.

### V. Recommendations

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1. Utilize human reviewers for eating disorder-related posts given the inability of Meta's automated systems to accurately decipher between pro-recovery user generated content and pro-eating disorder user generated content.

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<sup>9</sup> Au, E. S., & Cosh, S. (2022). Social media and eating disorder recovery: An exploration of Instagram recovery community users and their reasons for engagement. *Eating Behaviors*, 46, 101651.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

2. Invest in education and training of human reviewers to understand the difference between pro-eating disorders content versus content that supports eating disorder recovery.
3. Improve algorithmic modeling for all platforms to minimize exposure to harmful content and support users seeking recovery by implementing the following:
  - a. Requiring user’s opt-in to personalized recommendation systems.
  - b. Designing easily identifiable settings that allow users to customize their feeds
  - c. Removing the “Explore” feature on Instagram.
  - d. Removing built-in beauty filters that Meta’s research has shown to cause body dysmorphia in users.<sup>12</sup>
4. Review, identify, and implement revised policies to ensure Meta’s advertising policies align with the company’s community guidelines.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a public comment on this topic and we look forward to reviewing the Oversight Board’s decision.

Sincerely,

Board of Directors,  
Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action

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<sup>12</sup> Complaint for Injunctive and Other Relief, Bonta v. Meta Platforms, Inc., No. 4:23-cv 05448 (Dist. Cir. Ct. Northern CA).