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## “Above the Bias” launch in New York City doubles down on addressing diabetes stigma – February 4, 2025

*Launch of “Above the Bias” short film showcases shame surrounding living with diabetes; powerful panel and diverse audience gather to discuss ways to dismantle stigma*

To support the launch of Abbott’s global “[Above the Bias](#)” initiative, leaders in the field gathered on February 4<sup>th</sup> for a stirring panel discussion event centered around the company’s powerful new [short film](#), which has reached almost two million views only six days after release. Attendees braved a blustery day in New York’s Flatiron District to reach Home Studios, located on the third floor of an unassuming building. The venue was decorated in French bistro style, and was a familiar, celebratory gathering including a host of Abbott representatives. The initiative is designed to combat the pervasive stigma surrounding T1D and T2D by showing how comments can affect people with diabetes and how these accumulate over time.



Source: Abbott’s new short film, “The Emotional Toll of Diabetes”[\[1\]](#)

Through continued advocacy, open dialogue, and immersive experiences, Abbott hopes that the public will understand more about the daily experience of people with diabetes and, therefore, promote more understanding.

### Table of Contents

1. [Stirring launch event in New York City emulates the daily life of people with diabetes](#)
2. [Powerful panel discussion sheds light on stigma, stereotypes, and prejudice faced by people with diabetes](#)
3. [Engaging commentary and Q&A reflect the initiative’s importance to the community](#)
4. [The broader “Above the Bias” initiative aims to use Abbott’s reach to address the deep-seated impacts of diabetes stigma](#)

## 5. [Close Concerns' Questions](#)

### **Stirring launch event in New York City emulates the daily life of people with diabetes**

Abbott's "Above the Bias" launch event provided an immersive experience of living with diabetes. Four seemingly innocuous waiters dressed in black made jarring, stigmatizing, and unsolicited comments on the nutritional content of some of the food. They asked participants why they weren't fearful of eating certain foods that would "surely cause diabetes," all the while offering those foods to attendees. The unexpected judgment at a celebratory, positive event immediately felt out of place and left many attendees with puzzled expressions and even potential distress. An adjacent room display flashed stressful and harmful quotes, such as, "You did it to yourself." Abbott Diabetes Care's Chief Medical Officer [Dr. Mahmood Kazemi](#) said that these experiences sought to reveal how daily interactions can increase the burden of living with diabetes. The immersion was effective and emotional, and its unexpected nature provided a glimpse of the minefields that people with diabetes navigate when eating with others.

### **Powerful panel discussion sheds light on stigma, stereotypes, and prejudice faced by people with diabetes**

After viewing Abbott's striking, new, [70-second short film](#) capturing the weight of judgmental diabetes-related comments, the event transitioned to a panel discussion on the daily challenges of diabetes, featuring Ms. Debbie Allen (actress, *Grey's Anatomy*), Dr. Susan Guzman (Behavioral Diabetes Institute), Ms. Jeniese Hosey (person living with T2D), and Dr. Jane K. Dickinson (Immediate Past President of ADCES and person living with T1D). Dr. Kazemi moderated the discussion, emphasizing that the multi-year initiative hopes to improve diabetes awareness with the public, specifically those who may unknowingly perpetuate stigma through their assumptions about the condition. The launch event was a powerful glimpse at the daily experiences of people with diabetes, and we hope that the "Above the Bias" initiative improves public understanding of diabetes and fosters more inclusivity. Notably, Abbott's success in CGM development was left unmentioned, further underscoring its drive to expand the company's impact beyond diabetes technology. See below for some key takeaways from this panel.

- **Dr. Dickinson on the physical and emotional consequences of stigma and importance of person-first language:** A clinical psychologist specializing in diabetes and [expert on the impact of language](#) in diabetes care, Dr. Dickinson was instrumental in [ADCES's efforts to standardize and improve](#) the language used when discussing diabetes. She described her experiences witnessing how judgment and bias lead people with diabetes to avoid care, citing Abbott's research showing that 40% of people with diabetes have skipped appointments due to stigma. Nearing 50 years of living with T1D herself (in June), she also shared the personal impact of these damaging messages: "[In my 20s], a healthcare provider said that I wouldn't achieve my career goals because I would die first from kidney disease." She emphasized the role of person-first language in combating stigma, explaining that small shifts — such as saying "person living with diabetes" instead of "diabetic" as a noun — help foster more supportive, respectful dialogue and emphasize the lifelong, daily nature of the disease.
- **Ms. Allen on the power of storytelling and representation:** Known for her role as Dr. Catherine Fox [\[2\]](#) in *Grey's Anatomy* [\[3\]](#) since 2011, and a long-time diabetes [advocate](#), Ms. Allen riveted the audience with her discussion of the importance of accurate portrayals of diabetes in media: "There is a responsibility for film and TV to portray things accurately, and if they are not, we need to hold them accountable." She emphasized that this is especially important given the speed at which media disseminates information, which has primarily been addressed in fragmented ways, as opposed to globally. Drawing upon her deeply personal, familial connection to diabetes, she also discussed her efforts to educate her friends and family, recognizing that they could be the greatest source of support — or a source of diabetes-related distress.
- **Ms. Hosey on living with diabetes and self-advocacy:** Ms. Hosey described diabetes-related stigma that affects many aspects of her life, including friends, family, and her career. She said that even healthcare practitioners can perpetuate harmful messages, sharing how her first endocrinologist imparted feelings of insignificance and isolation: "I had to advocate for myself to get the care I deserved... to have that additional burden of having to explain yourself is a lot to put on someone already working through a complex disease." She encouraged the audience to approach others with empathy and grace, replacing judgment with compassion

and support.

- **Dr. Guzman on the impact of stigma in everyday life:** Dr. Guzman emphasized the widespread nature of diabetes stigma. Drawing from her 20 years of experience working with people living with diabetes, with an emphasis on [“listening” before “fixing.”](#) she shared a common sentiment of the community: “I feel really misunderstood and alone in this experience.” She echoed Dr. Kazemi’s message, reinforcing that the “Above the Bias” initiative aims to “help the rest of the [people in the] world who don’t live with diabetes understand and have empathy for those who do.” When discussing how to become an effective diabetes advocate, she urged the audience to reflect on their own misconceptions and have the courage to speak up. “People do better when they feel cared for, encouraged, and supported. We all have a responsibility to change that.”

### Engaging commentary and Q&A reflect the initiative’s importance to the community

- **Dr. Aaron Kowalski (President and CEO, Breakthrough T1D)** emphasized the often overlooked genetic aspect of T2D and inaccurate perceptions of T2D’s preventability. He is opposed to the term “prevention of T2D” and believes that the medical community is often delayed in responding to stigma at the time of diagnosis due to this perception of preventability.
- **Mr. Chuck Henderson (CEO, ADA)** directly addressed Ms. Allen, acknowledging that some of the most impactful leaders in diabetes research were in the room and asking her what they could do to meet people where they are. Ms. Allen responded with the importance of starting early intervention, explaining that she speaks to her young grandchildren regularly about healthy diets and the experiences of people with diabetes. She added that she regularly observes youth perspectives on health and diabetes through her work with the Debbie Allen Dance Academy. She called for HCPs to stand together and encourage the FDA to ban advertisements of sugar-filled cereals to children, as well as increase education among the youth.
- **Dr. Rifka Schulman-Rosenbaum (AACE)** added that people limit effective care and management when declining to wear a CGM due to stigma or hesitating to inject insulin in front of others. She also said that diabetes bias is not taught in medical school. She encouraged implementing efforts to increase education and awareness about diabetes among residents.

### The broader “Above the Bias” initiative aims to use Abbott’s reach to address the deep-seated impacts of diabetes stigma

As shared [at the time of launch](#), Abbott’s approach to addressing diabetes starts with the company’s powerful survey (n=2600). The results showed that 70% of people with diabetes believe exposure to positive and supportive messaging would significantly boost their motivation in diabetes management. To address this, Abbott calls for greater awareness, education, and empathy, imploring people to:

- **Understand common misconceptions:** At [AboveBias.com](#), Abbott invites people to take a short quiz to uncover their own biases and learn more about diabetes, stating that misconception is the most dangerous component of stigma.
- **Recognize diabetes stigma and prejudice:** The [2024 international consensus statement](#) on addressing diabetes stigma found near-unanimous agreement (Grade A) that most people without diabetes are unaware their stigma exists.
- **Practice empathy:** Challenging cultural biases starts with awareness and open dialogue.

Abbott has already piloted a similar program in the UK, the [“Let’s Change Perspective”](#) initiative, and it will be fascinating to hear how it will continue to expand its efforts internationally. We look forward to watching the initiative grow further.

### Close Concerns’ Questions

1. What actions from public and private corporations could most impact diabetes stigma?
2. What other therapeutic areas (e.g., lung cancer) have taken on stigma successfully?

3. What impact has Abbott’s [“Let’s Change Perspective”](#) initiative from 2022, which tackles unconscious bias and diabetes stigma, had in the UK so far, and what lessons can be applied to “Above the Bias”?
4. How might parts of the “Above the Bias” initiative be modified to most effectively reach communities outside of the UK and the US?

*--by Nour Khachemoune, Lucy Masto, Jeremy Alkire, Andrew Goyette, Monica Oxenreiter, and Kelly Close*

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[1] [Linked here](#) is the “global” version of the short film that had over 1.3 million views at press time. The [“US version”](#) has over 400,000 additional views, making for nearly two million views in one week – very impressive!

[2] Ms. Allen’s character is a urologist, and is diagnosed with chondrosarcoma, a bone and joint cancer, in the show’s 15<sup>th</sup> season. The actress discussed how the storyline raises awareness for cancer and hopes to introduce a diabetes-related storyline to capture similar benefits.

[3] The show is the [second most-streamed worldwide](#), amassing 47.85 billion viewing hours in 2024, and is currently in its 21<sup>st</sup> season. It has been credited with increasing medical awareness and interest for a broad global audience.