

Topic Overview

Promoting Healthy Weights Using Population-based Interventions in Canada

Stakeholder Dialogue 17 September 2012

The McMaster Health Forum convened a stakeholder dialogue on the subject of promoting healthy weights using population-based interventions in Canada. With the support of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the dialogue brought together participants – 6 policymakers, 5 managers, 3 healthcare professionals, 4 researchers, and 3 representatives from public-interest groups – from across Canada to examine the problem, options for addressing it, and key implementation considerations.



The views expressed in the evidence brief and dialogue summary are the views of the authors and should not be taken to represent the views of the funders.

Deliberation about the problem

All dialogue participants agreed that the prevalence of overweight and obesity in Canada, and in turn, its associated health and economic burden, is significant and growing. However, there was concern among most participants about framing the problem to be focused on obesity instead of on obesity as an outcome of a complex problem driven by many factors at the individual, community, societal and environmental level (or more generally about healthy and active living). Participants then deliberated about differing views and framings of the factors driving the problem which focused on: 1) whether the problem is driven by factors at the individual level (e.g., sedentarism) or at the community, societal and/or environmental level (e.g., elements of the built environment that may support or limit healthy and active living); 2) whether and how the problem affects specific groups (e.g., those of low socioeconomic status) and whether focusing on such groups detracts from recognizing overweight and obesity as a problem that affects everyone; and 3) the lack of inter-sectoral collaboration to address the problem.





Participants drawn from government and from health, professional and research organizations gather during a McMaster Health Forum event on 17 September 2012

Deliberation about an approach

Most dialogue participants generally agreed that the three options – information and skills building, programs to support healthy settings, and guidelines and policies to enable healthy food and activity requirements – were elements of a comprehensive approach to promoting healthy weights given that components of each will be needed for efforts to be successful. While most agreed about the need for a comprehensive approach, several dialogue participants also highlighted the need to consider the optimal sequencing of and relative emphasis given to the options. For example, several dialogue participants argued that option 3 (guidelines and policies to enable healthy food and physical activity environments) be prioritized before options 1 (information and skills building) and 2 (programs to support healthy settings) given that policies need to be in place first, and then information/skills building and programs reinforce them.

Also, some dialogue participants suggested that option 1 (information and skills building) was relatively less important than options 2 and 3, whereas others argued that option 1 could be important provided that the focus is on new and promising strategies instead of what were called ‘tired’ or more traditional approaches such as mass media campaigns.

Deliberation about next steps

Moving forward, dialogue participants emphasized the need to collectively: 1) be prepared to take advantage of ‘windows of opportunity’ to build momentum; 2) embrace the power of incrementalism for producing long-term change; 3) build a menu of evidence-based options that can be scaled up but tailored to the needs of specific communities and populations; 4) produce Canadian evidence about whether and how efforts to promote healthy weights are having an impact; and 5) be attentive to opportunity costs and ensuring the most effective interventions are scaled up in a way that makes the best use of investments made. Dialogue participants also raised one or more of the following as important priorities for them to push forward personally: 1) restricting marketing and taxing unhealthy foods; 2) measurement (e.g., ‘report cards’ for tracking change); and 3) supporting community engagement.

Dialogue deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult the [evidence brief](#) that was presented to participants before the dialogue, the [summary](#) of the dialogue, and [view](#) or [listen](#) to the [interviews](#) with dialogue participants. For an electronic copy of the evidence brief or dialogue summary, or to view or listen to the interviews, visit our website www.mcmasterhealthforum.com and click on ‘Products’ along the sidebar, or for direct access to our YouTube and iTunes U channels, simply click on the icons below.



>> Contact us

1280 Main St. West, MML-417
 McMaster University
 Hamilton, ON Canada L8S 4L6
 Tel: +1.905.525.9140 x 22121
 Fax: +1.905.521.2721
 Email: mhf@mcmaster.ca

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