

SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES TOWARDS OBESITY PREVENTION

Jaap Seidell and Marije van Koperen

VU University, Amsterdam

The Netherlands

Childhood obesity is a complex issue and needs multistakeholder involvement at all levels to foster healthier lifestyles in a sustainable way. 'Ensemble Prévenons l'Obésité Des Enfants' (EPODE, Together Let's Prevent Childhood Obesity) is a large-scale, coordinated, capacity-building approach for communities to implement effective and sustainable strategies to prevent childhood obesity. This paper describes EPODE methodology and its objective of preventing childhood obesity. At a central level, a coordination team, using social marketing and organizational techniques, trains and coaches a local project manager nominated in each EPODE community by the local authorities. The local project manager is also provided with tools to mobilize local stakeholders through a local steering committee and local networks. The added value of the methodology is to mobilize stakeholders at all levels across the public and the private sectors. Its critical components include political commitment, sustainable resources, support services and a strong scientific input – drawing on the evidence-base – together with evaluation of the programme. Since 2004, EPODE methodology has been implemented in more than 500 communities in six countries. Community-based interventions are integral to childhood obesity prevention. EPODE provides a valuable model to address this challenge.

We developed these EPODE principles further and established an evaluation framework. Determinants of overweight and obesity can be found at individual and environmental level. Prevention strategies should therefore be directed at those levels in a comprehensive integrated community approach. Exploratory research from five major local collaborations in 2010 in The Netherlands between academic institutions, community health services and local authorities (Academic Collaborative Centres (ACC) for Public Health) identified gaps in knowledge, expertise and used methodology to successfully implement and evaluate such an approach. Identified gaps were: emergence and development of political support; the use of social marketing techniques; parental involvement in interventions; success of intended adoption and implementation processes and the evaluation methodology of this approach.

Methods

The five ACC, now combined in the Consortium Integrated Approach Overweight (CIAO), shared knowledge and expertise and studied the implementation of multiple comprehensive community approaches preventing overweight in children. To develop theoretical frameworks literature was studied on best practises regarding the five study topics and interviews were held with program leaders, political representatives, policy makers, users and target audiences



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Results

The initial findings of CIAO comprise a determined overarching program theory, a developed theoretical framework for the emergence and development of political support and intersectoral collaboration, a review of evaluation frameworks to be used for the community approach and development of an evaluation tool regarding the social marketing techniques.

Conclusion

Future activities of CIAO will focus on identifying methods and possibilities within the collaboration of the domains of policy, practice and research, for use in comprehensive integrated community approach to prevent overweight.



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