

# Early intervention to prevent obesity and reduce obesity inequalities:

the current state of knowledge and implications for  
health promotion research, policy and practice

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20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Health Promotion Conference, NUI Galway

Theme A: Gaps between evidence of effectiveness and what occurs in practice

15 June 2016



# Outline

- Childhood obesity and inequalities
- Early intervention
- Policy and practice context
- Implications for future research and practice in the area of obesity prevention during infancy
- Concluding remarks



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# Childhood obesity

- Nationally **1 in 4** three-year olds is overweight or obese<sup>1</sup>
- Tracks into adulthood<sup>2,3</sup>
- Rapid growth in infancy associated with adult adiposity and obesity<sup>4</sup> and cardiometabolic risk<sup>5</sup>
- Overweight/obesity appears to be levelling off in Ireland<sup>6</sup>; not in the US<sup>7</sup>
- Associated factors include maternal pre-pregnancy overweight, smoking during pregnancy, high infant birthweight, rapid weight gain<sup>8</sup>
  - ROLO study - Maternal BMI 2 years postpartum positively associated with offspring BMI<sup>9</sup>



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# Childhood obesity - inequalities

- Rates, and tracking, of overweight and obesity are socio-economically patterned<sup>1,3</sup>
- Strong socioeconomic gradient exists for the majority of the early-life predictors of obesity<sup>10</sup>
  - (1) pre-natally: pre-pregnancy maternal BMI, diabetes, pre-pregnancy diet
  - (2) antenatal/peri natally: smoking during pregnancy, low birth weight
  - (3) early-life nutrition: breastfeeding initiation and duration, early introduction of solids, maternal and infant diet quality
- Interventions do not increase inequalities<sup>11</sup>

# Early intervention

- Pregnancy and the early years = critical window for tackling childhood overweight and obesity
  - WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity<sup>12</sup>
- Also associated socio-economic inequalities<sup>13</sup>
  - Marmot Review: Fair Society Healthy Lives<sup>14</sup>
- Recent ↑ nos. of interventions involving children aged <2y<sup>15</sup>
  - Impact on child weight is limited

# Some of the interventions...

ANCE 2016

Physical Map of the World, April 2004

AUSTRALIA  
Bermuda  
Independent state  
Dependency or area of special sovereignty

Healthy babies



SLIMTIME

OPPS

Tools for Teen Moms

Insight

ECHO

First Steps for Mommy & Me

Primrose



STRIPP  
VACOPP



Happy  
HENRY

InFANT



Healthy Beginnings  
Nourish  
Parent Infant  
Feeding Initiative  
Growing Healthy  
Kids Sleep Study

BLISS  
Pol.nz



April 2004

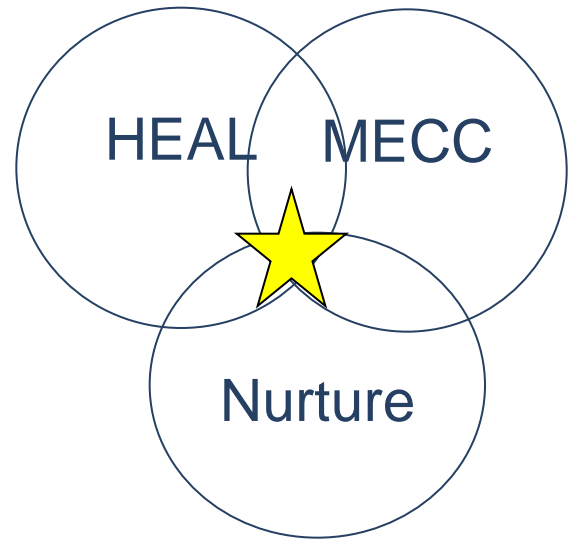
Source: CIA, The World Factbook  
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# Policy & practice context

- Obesity (+ early intervention) = national policy priority
  - Proportional universalism
- Health professionals - details of what/how unclear

Make every contact count!



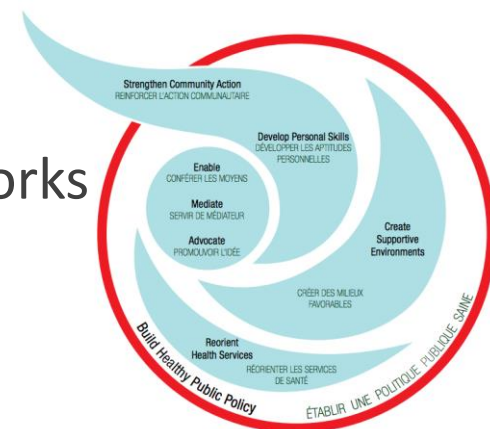
# Implications for future research and practice

- Why do interventions work / not?
- What happens in practice? How can we standardise effective practice?
  - Need to ground in evidence
- What are health professionals' and parents' views and experiences of preventative interventions and engaging in same?



# Concluding remarks

- Obesity is a significant challenge  
...it's certainly not going away
- Prevention / early intervention is key  
...but we need to better understand what works
- Need to move from policy rhetoric...  
...to effective action...
- ...Together...Multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral, multi-level approach



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# Questions?

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