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**A rapid synthesis of evidence on whole systems approaches to obesity prevention to inform policy**  
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**Background:**

The Department of Health in Northern Ireland is developing a new obesity prevention strategy. To support policy development, the Institute of Public Health commissioned a rapid synthesis of evidence on whole systems approaches to obesity prevention. Objectives were to present evidence from existing reviews on whole systems approach effectiveness, describe case studies where a whole systems approach has been applied and propose key policy considerations.

**Methods:**

A rapid synthesis of evidence on whole systems approaches, rather than a full systematic evidence review, was conducted to meet policy development timelines. Review articles were included, as were national and international case studies that described whole systems approach implementation and/or evaluation. The Methodological Index for Non-Randomised Studies Framework was used to assess the methodological quality of the case studies.

**Results:**

Five review articles and five case studies (majority moderate-borderline strong quality) were included. Results showed whole

systems approaches can be associated with improvements in Body Mass Index, physical activity environment and improved community wellbeing, with a school component being particularly effective. Facilitators to implementation included leadership, community involvement, consistent language, adequate resources and evaluation/systems science knowledge.

**Conclusions:**

Whole systems approaches can be effective in enhancing the capacity of communities to create healthier environments and deliver measurable reductions in Body Mass Index.

**Key messages:**

- Whole systems approaches to obesity prevention can be effective in creating healthier environments.
- Findings from this research could support any future pilot of this approach in Northern Ireland.