

## **Improving nutrition, promoting health: the role of economic evaluation**

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Many governments are adopting policies to improve nutrition and, more generally, to promote healthy lifestyles, in an attempt to counter the rising tide of obesity and chronic diseases. These efforts have been hindered by the limited availability of evidence about the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of possible interventions. The presentation will discuss key methodological issues in applying standard economic evaluation approaches in the area of nutrition and health promotion, largely based on the experience of OECD and WHO in assessing the efficiency of interventions to tackle unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles. The presentation will address the use of modelling approaches, particularly micro-simulation models, as a way to address the methodological difficulties associated with the long time frame in which health promotion strategies produce their effects, and the uncertainty that follows from this. Established tools for the evaluation of the effectiveness of health care interventions, such as randomised controlled trials, have a limited role in the assessment of complex health promotion strategies, and model-based approaches are required to translate the short-term outcomes measured by such evaluations into longer term effects to be expected at the population level. The presentation will discuss key results of existing model-based analyses and their relevance in a decision-making perspective. Joint OECD/WHO work on nutrition interventions shows that these can be as cost effective as many accepted forms of health care and may help to reduce health inequalities between socio-economic groups, although expectations that prevention would cut health expenditures for the treatment of chronic diseases are often misplaced.