

HTA for Public Health Interventions: addressing the challenges of complexity and uncertainty

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Abstract

Unhealthy lifestyles are increasingly eroding public health (PH) systems and human well-being, while hampering socio-economic development in many countries and threatening the sustainability of healthcare infrastructures. PH interventions that can achieve population level behavior changes may reach outstanding results in the control of non-communicable diseases but are inevitably highly complex and multilevel. Their (cost-)effectiveness is often highly dependent on the context in which they are delivered and on a range of implementation factors. PH policy needs to be informed by appropriate HTA analyses, based on both scientific evidence and meaningful projections, to meet the needs of decision makers and to be applicable to diverse communities. Nevertheless, the use of traditional HTA methods may be unhelpful for a range of reasons: they might ignore important and relevant non-health outcomes or suggest there is inadequate evidence in the absence of randomized trials. The evaluation of PH interventions may highlight their complexity and identify irreducible areas of uncertainty. This can lead in turn to a failure to produce useful recommendations for decision makers. It should be acknowledged that in spite of uncertainties it is urgent: to effectively explore the best solutions; to implement evidence based preventive interventions; to track progress to monitor their impact in different settings/populations.

Structure of Session

Case studies of HTA for complex PH behavior change intervention topics, where evidence-based policies are urgently needed, will be presented:

- the role of physical activity as a therapeutic intervention across physical and mental health. From a PH perspective, this can be addressed at different levels – for example, through interventions targeted at individuals like brief advice in primary care, through to environmental interventions such as improving traffic routes for cyclists.
- how a simple change in daily food pattern may contribute in reducing the impact of non-communicable diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, and thus relieve pressure on the healthcare infrastructures in the long term .

In addition concepts and methods to assess complex health technologies will be presented that have been developed in the EU-funded project “Integrated health technology assessment for the evaluation of complex technologies” (INTEGRATE-HTA).

The presentations will be followed by a panel discussion to identify some of the lessons for making HTA of PH interventions as robust and useful as possible.