



Because obesity is a complex systems problem, it needs a complex adaptive systems approach, and you can only deliver that approach if there is central co-ordination. That doesn't mean that part of the programme can't be delivered by different municipality or private organisations, but it is all within one set framework.

Karen den Hertog, Amsterdam Healthy Weight Programme (research interview)

The Amsterdam Healthy Weight Programme

The Amsterdam Healthy Weight Programme is a whole-system approach to reducing childhood obesity founded on the premise that a healthy life for children is the responsibility not just of parents but also of schools, neighbourhoods, health professionals, city planners, legislators, the food industry and others. The programme was launched in 2013 with the aim that within 20 years, there should be no overweight or obese children in the city.

One of the notable features of the programme is its long-term vision. It is framed around a 20-year plan divided into three main phases. The City Council has supported this by awarding the programme an indicative budget extending to 2033 (currently worth €5.2 million annually). It is anticipated that the interventions deployed in the programme will evolve over time as information on their impact becomes available. Measures currently being used include the following:

- new policies in schools, for example, only tap water is drunk in primary schools, packed lunches must be healthy, and more time is allotted for physical activity
- regulatory measures, including a ban on advertisements for unhealthy foods targeting children in subway stations, and a ban on unhealthy sponsorship at sporting events aimed at children
- targeted interventions in neighbourhoods with the highest obesity levels, co-created with local residents and community organisations
- a number of interventions focused on the first 1,000 days of a child's life, from conception to the second birthday, including support for women to live healthily during pregnancy and to offer their baby a healthy lifestyle from birth
- training for health and other professionals in talking sensitively to parents about healthy choices
- a network of food businesses, including a major supermarket chain, exploring their role in supporting healthy eating in childhood.

continued on next page



The Amsterdam Healthy Weight Programme *continued*

Crucially, the components of the programme are co-ordinated through strong programme management and a continuous adaptive learning process that uses output and outcome monitoring and ongoing formative evaluation.

Early results have been encouraging. Rates of childhood overweight and obesity fell from 21 to 18.5 per cent over the first years of the programme, although it is not clear what this reduction can be attributed to. This is a reversal of the trend for rising rates of childhood obesity seen in many cities internationally.

We are starting to see a real change happening at grassroots level, with neighbourhoods, communities, groups of mums or dads making healthier choices for their children and actively going to their schools and asking for more healthy choices, or organising activities to keep their children in contact with healthy messaging.

Karen den Hertog, Amsterdam Healthy Weight Programme (research interview)

A similar message emerges from Amsterdam's work on HIV. Since 2012, Amsterdam has built a consortium of all the stakeholders involved in HIV prevention or treatment across the city to devise a shared programme of work. Partner organisations pool funding, and receive additional money from the city government, pharmaceutical industry and fundraising events. The consortium – known as the 'H Team' – is held together by a centralised body responsible for co-ordinating activities across partners and overseeing how each contributes to the overall programme objectives. Interviewees stressed that allocating adequate funding for performing this co-ordination function was a critical part of the programme's success.

The second lesson about co-ordination identified by our research was that when city agencies use their convening power to bring together partners from across the system, this can be particularly impactful if done in the context of an explicit approach for collaborating and achieving change. Many US cities have used formalised methodologies to provide a structure for partnership working. One example is the Collective Impact framework developed by Kania and Kramer (2011). This has been used in a number of cities, including in San Francisco as part of the influential 'Getting to Zero' HIV prevention programme (see box below). Similarly,