



An Roinn Caiteachais  
Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe  
Department of Public  
Expenditure and Reform

# Understanding Prevention & Early Intervention as Public Policy – A comparison of policies and programmes in Ireland

*PEIN Webinar*

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IGEES

Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service

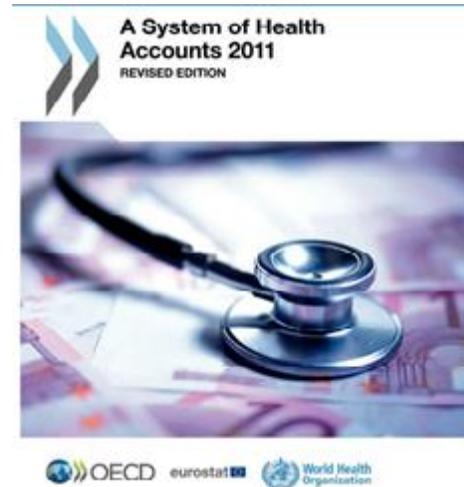
# A general understanding

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**“prevention is better than cure”**

**“a stitch in time saves nine”**



- Top-down policies and programmes
- Informed by evidence of what works
- That provided the individual with an almost immediate benefit of avoiding (serious) harm

# Comparative Framework

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- Rationale for a public policy response
- Policy environment
- Openness of policy makers to engaging with a broad range of relevant stakeholders
- Quality of evidence used to inform the policy process
- How evidence is utilised within the policy making process

# Comparison of Policies and Programmes

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- Rationale
  - “Merit services” associated with positive externalities
  - “Merit services” that promote social equality
  - Productivity gains that alleviate impact of social inequality
- Policy Environment
  - Policy agenda
    - Long standing
    - Informed by pilot programmes
    - Change in how people think about policy challenges / social norms
    - Developed incrementally
    - Highlight an emerging policy challenge
  - Resources (2020 allocations)
    - €[736]m children, young people and families (+[65]% since 2014); €140m health (+63% since 2014)

# Comparison of Policies and Programmes

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- Open Policy Process
  - Departments are central actors in wider policy communities (e.g., other government departments, public service agencies, community and voluntary bodies, professionals)
  - Engage with stakeholders' expertise and experience
    - To development of public policy
    - Support and drive the implementation of cross-government strategies
- Quality of Evidence and Evaluation
  - Health Sector – need for robust evidence as interventions being provided to large numbers of health people (RCTs to determine if effective and safe)
  - Human services – variation in types of evidence available
    - Robust evaluations required under PEII / PEIP
    - *ABC Programme* – national level evaluation (not of individual programmatic interventions)
    - Educational welfare – control groups unavailable and inappropriate; rarely focus on children and young people

# Comparison of Policies and Programmes

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- Evidence in Policy Making
  - Cost effectiveness analysis
    - Associated with health sector
    - *Incredible Years* and *Preparing for Life*
  - Association between the complexity of the policy intervention and the clarity of the policy objective
    - Absence of a clear policy objective hinders ability to monitor and evaluation policy or programme
    - Health – interventions are “simple” and objectives are clear
    - Children, young people and families – interventions tend to be complicated and “objectives” tend to focus on describing services to be provided rather than the outcome to be achieved
  - Investment in increasing capacity of practitioners to collect and use data seems to be contributing to increased use of evidence to inform planning and delivery, assess quality and learn from experience

# Discussion

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- As a central appeal of PEI is acting early to prevent a challenge from emerging or worsening, it is reasonable that evidence demonstrating efficacy should be at core of efforts to design and implement PEI policies and programmes
  - Complex *policy challenges* – difficult to define and measure intended outcome
  - Complex *policy interventions* – difficult to set out clear policy objective
  - Raises questions about the appropriateness and applicability of RCTs
  - Recognise and acknowledge the limitations of what know and what can be done
  - Evidence may be contingent – support understanding of the policy challenge and factors that influence it
- About more than immediate benefit of avoiding (serious) harm
  - Promote factors that support an individual's development over prolonged period of time
  - Benefits may not be obvious at point of consumption
  - Benefits extend beyond the citizen to society more generally
  - Idea of “immediate” poses reputational risk – an investment of time is required

# Discussion

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- Government departments are not the sole source of ideas, expertise or resources
  - Origins are wide ranging – global scientific efforts to experience in other countries / cities to efforts by local people to tackle challenges
  - The “local” aspect to PEI perhaps accentuates expectations of an open policy process (when compared with other policies)
- There is much that needs to be done about complex *policy challenges* and complex *policy interventions*
  - Nature of the policy challenge – what is meant by well-being and how might it be measured?
  - Factors that impact the desired policy outcome – what factors support or undermine well-being?
  - What can public policy realistically be expected to achieve – clarity of purpose and appropriate measurement and assessment tools?



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# Thank you!

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