

## Handout A

### Case study – “Let’s lose a million pounds!”

Your public health unit has been asked to comment on and participate in implementing some of the propositions put forward to meet the city’s goal in the “Let’s lose a million pounds!” challenge. Among the proposed initiatives is a junk food ban for all public buildings (schools, hospitals, government offices, etc.). Only foods deemed healthy will be offered in cafeterias and vending machines, and workers in public buildings will be encouraged to only bring healthy foods to their workplaces. Those seen to be in contravention will be asked to walk a kilometre.

**Using the framework outlined below, please discuss this case in small groups (+/- 30 min.). We would like one person per group to summarize the group’s responses to the following questions:**

- A. After an ethical examination of the program, would you approve it? For what reasons?
- B. Would the program have to be modified to make it ethically acceptable? Why?
- C. What was most helpful in the framework you used?
- D. Did the framework fail to highlight anything important?

**To guide the discussion, your public health unit is using a slightly adapted version of the ethical framework by ten Have et al. (2012).<sup>1</sup> It goes as follows:**

First part of the framework – As a group, discuss and respond to the following questions: (10-15 min.)

**1. How does the program affect physical health?**

(Time permitting, consider: Is it effective? Is it cost-effective? Does it have unintended negative health effects?)

**2. How does the program affect psychosocial well-being?**

(Does it have unintended negative psychosocial effects?)

**3. How does the program affect equality?**

(Are there groups in the population with a higher incidence of persons who are overweight or obese? How will the program affect different groups?)

**4. How does the program affect informed choice?**

<sup>1</sup> ten Have, M., van der Heide, A., Mackenbach, J. P., & Beaufort, I. D. (2012). An ethical framework for the prevention of overweight and obesity: a tool for thinking through a programme’s ethical aspects. *European Journal of Public Health*, 23(2), 299-305.



# Ethics practice for public health practitioners

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**5. How does the program affect social and cultural values?**

(Are there relevant cultural and social values associated with eating habits that will be affected by the program?)

**6. How does the program affect privacy?**

(Who's gathering the information? How is it gathered? Is confidentiality an issue?)

**7. How does the program affect the attribution of responsibilities?**

(Are responsibilities fairly balanced between individuals, groups and society?)

**8. How does the program affect liberty?**

(Does the programme constrain liberty? Does it enable people or communities?)

Second part of the framework – Once you are done with the first part, as a group, discuss and respond to the following questions: (15-20 min.)

- **What are the program's main ethical weaknesses?**
- **What are its main ethical strengths?**
- **How can you maximize its strengths and minimize its weaknesses?**
- **Do its strengths outweigh its weaknesses?**
- **Is there an alternative program with fewer weaknesses?**
- **What is the ethical justification for the remaining weaknesses?**
- **Under what conditions should the program be implemented?**

This case is inspired by various million pound-type weight-loss initiatives. For example, in Southern Wisconsin (<http://www.princetonclub.net/mpc>), Oklahoma City (<https://www.thiscityisgoingonadiet.com/>), Houston (<http://www.shapeuphouston.org/about/millionpoundchallenge>), San Jose – Silicon Valley (<http://www.loseamillion.com/>), Canada (<http://www.public-value.cbc.radio-canada.ca/story/43/>) etc.