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# Synthesising Knowledge on Healthy Public Policy

Challenges and Methodological Perspectives

François-Pierre Gauvin, Marie-Christine Hogue,  
Louise St-Pierre and Denise Kouri

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# Introduction

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- The evidence-based approach seeks to ensure that solid data underpin decision-making and practices.
  - This approach is limited in public policy because of the methodologies that it favours and what usually serves as evidence.
- The NCCHPP is developing a methodology to synthesise knowledge on policy instruments, aimed at combining public health and political science.
  - Pilot project on policy instruments to fight obesity



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# Presentation of the pilot project

## Question and objectives

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- Question
  - What policy instruments have the best chance of successfully fighting obesity in Canada?
- Objectives
  - Pinpoint and classify the policy instruments proposed to combat obesity.
  - Identify the scientific foundations for these instruments.
  - Ascertain the implications of adopting and implementing the most promising instruments, bearing in mind their nature and the Canadian context.

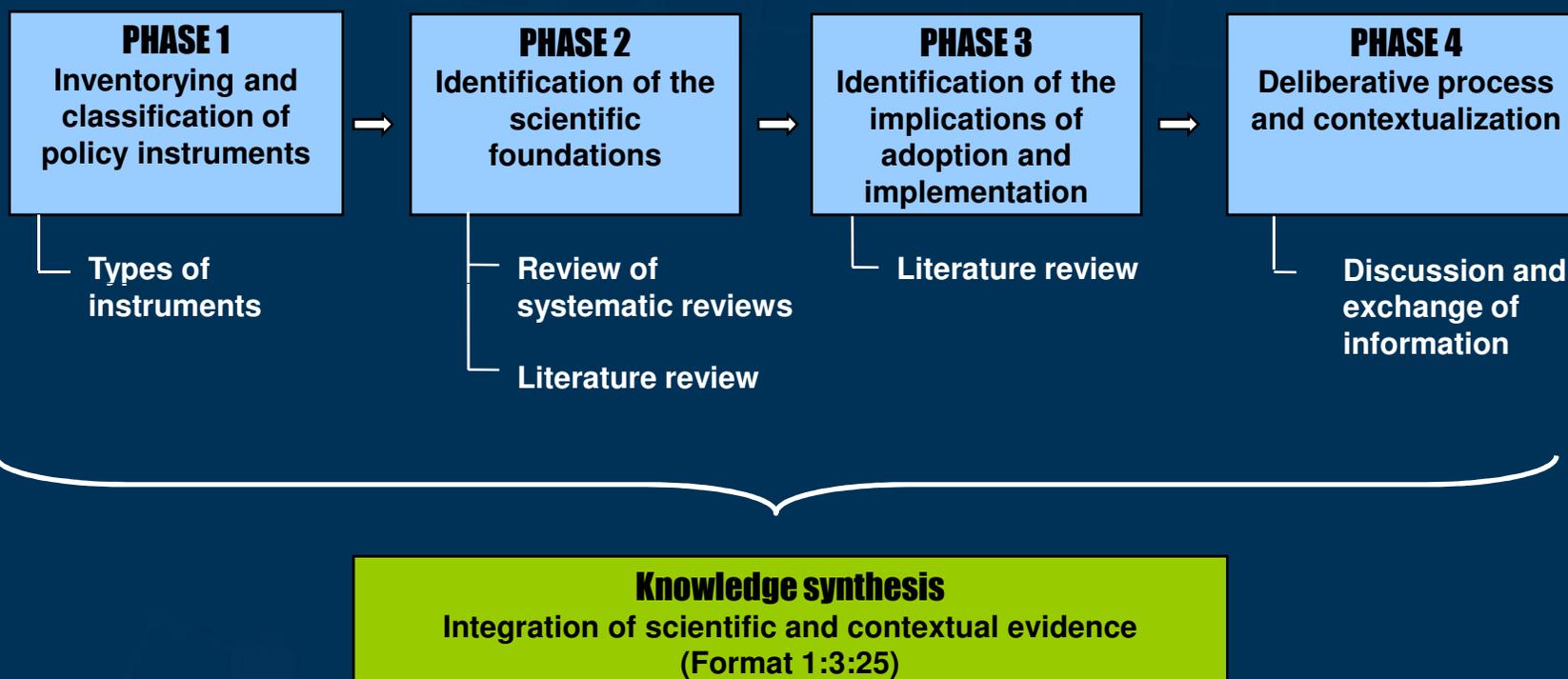


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# Methodology of the pilot project



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# PHASE 1

## Inventorying of policy instruments



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# Phase 1

## Inventorizing of policy instruments

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- The first phase consists in inventorizing the policy instruments proposed to fight obesity.
  - We have selected a sample of instruments that we will examine in greater detail (criteria-based targeted sampling).
- The instruments were identified in two stages through:
  - a survey of instruments proposed by organizations to fight obesity in Québec, Canada and abroad;
  - a survey of instruments in scientific journals and in the grey literature.
- Once we had selected the instruments, we classified them and described them according to a taxonomy.



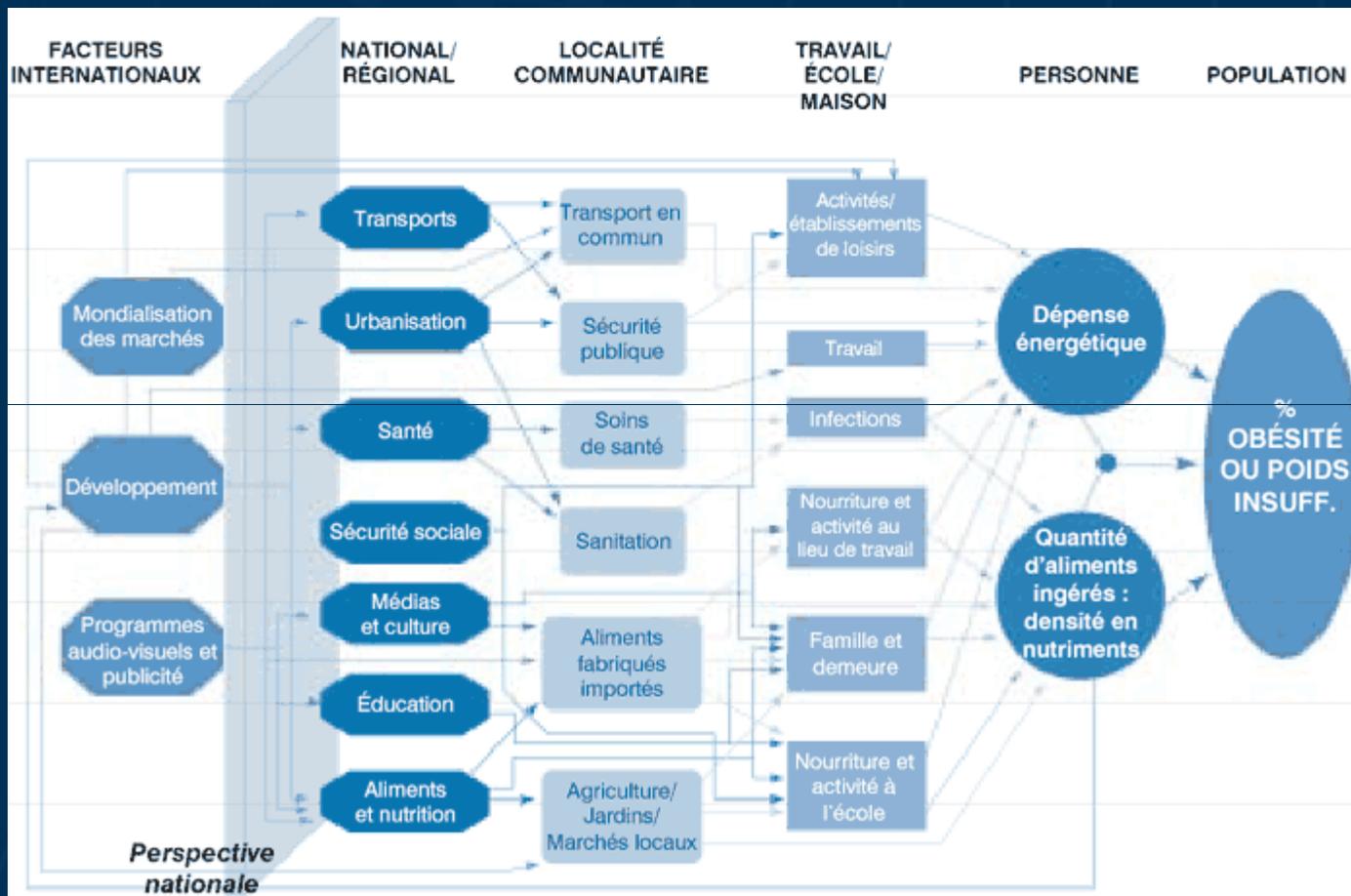
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# Phase 1 (continued)

## Inventorying of policy instruments



# Phase 1 (continued)

## Inventorizing of policy instruments

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- Examples of policy instruments
  - Regulate TV advertising aimed at children
  - Regulate the food products available in schools
  - Regulate junk food packaging
  - Establish obesity impact clauses in government policies
  - Tax junk food
  - Tax deduction for physical activity programs
  - Plan spaces that facilitate physical activity and healthy diet
  - Introduce social marketing campaigns
  - Fund research programs
  - Etc.



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# Phase 1 (continued)

## Inventorizing of policy instruments

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- A number of taxonomies have been developed since the 1960s.
- According to Salamon (2002), these taxonomies usually emphasize four facets of policy instruments:
  - degree of coerciveness;
  - degree of directness;
  - degree of automaticity;
  - degree of visibility.



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# PHASE 2

Identification of the scientific foundations



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# Phase 2

## Identification of the scientific foundations

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- We seek to pinpoint the scientific foundations of the instruments and to ascertain their anticipated efficacy.
  - There are few empirical studies on the efficacy of the instruments.
  - How can we guide decision-making in the absence of evidence?
- There is a need to broaden the concept of evidence to include other data and information sources.

“Findings from research and other knowledge that may serve as a useful basis for decision-making in public health and health care” (OMS-Europe, 2006).



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# Phase 2 (continued)

## What works?

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- We adopted a cascading approach.
  - A review of systematic reviews focusing on the efficacy of policy instruments in fighting obesity
  - A review of other data and information sources
- Several kinds of scientific data and information are relevant to combat obesity (Swinburn et al., 2005)
  - Observational studies
  - Experimental studies
  - Modeling (e.g. efficiency and economic analyses)
  - Parallel evidence (e.g. smoking and alcohol)
  - Theory and underlying logic
  - Informed opinions



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# Phase 2 (continued)

## Evaluate the quality of proof

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- How can we evaluate the quality of scientific proof?
  - Empirical studies
  - Other sources of evidence and information
- Haby et al. (2006) have developed a new hierarchy to evaluate the soundness of scientific proof

Haby et al. A new approach to assessing the health benefit from obesity interventions in children and adolescents: The assessing cost-effectiveness in obesity project. *International Journal of Obesity*. 2006, 30: 1463-1475.



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# Phase 2 (continued)

## Evaluate the quality of proof (Haby et al., 2006)

Études de niveaux I-III	Études de niveaux IV, preuves indirectes ou parallèles, ou études de modélisations utilisant diverses méthodologies
<p><b>1. Preuves suffisantes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L'effet n'est probablement pas dû à la chance ou aux biais</li> <li>• Preuves provenant d'études de niveau I ; plusieurs études de niveau II ; ou plusieurs études de niveau III desquels les biais et les variables confusionnelles ont pu être contrôlés.</li> </ul>	<p><b>3. Preuves limitées</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Théorie sous-jacente ou logique du programme est solide ; et</li> <li>• Études de niveau IV, preuves indirectes ou parallèles, ou</li> <li>• Études de modélisation statistique des indicateurs de résultats (ex. : IMC) en utilisant diverses méthodologies</li> <li>• L'effet n'est probablement pas dû à la chance ou aux biais</li> <li>• L'implantation d'une telle intervention devrait être accompagnée d'un programme d'évaluation</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Preuves limitées</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• L'effet n'est probablement pas dû à la chance</li> <li>• Certains biais peuvent expliquer l'effet</li> <li>• Preuves provenant d'une étude de niveau II de qualité incertaine ; études de niveau III de qualité qui ont des résultats consistants.</li> </ul>	<p><b>4. Preuves faibles</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Théorie sous-jacente ou logique du programme est solide ; ou</li> <li>• Études de niveau IV, preuves indirectes ou parallèles, ou</li> <li>• Études de modélisation statistique des indicateurs de résultats (ex. : IMC) en utilisant diverses méthodologies</li> <li>• L'effet n'est probablement pas dû à la chance</li> <li>• Certains biais peuvent expliquer l'effet</li> <li>• Il serait utile d'entreprendre davantage de recherches et/ou un projet-pilote avant d'implanter cette intervention.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Preuves non-concluantes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aucune conclusion ne peut être tirée quant à la présence ou l'absence d'effet ; seulement des études de niveau III disponibles, mais peu nombreuses et de mauvaises qualités.</li> </ul>	<p><b>6. Aucune preuve</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aucune conclusion ne peut être tirée quant à l'efficacité de l'intervention.</li> <li>• Plus de recherches sont nécessaires.</li> </ul>



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# PHASE 3

Identification of the implications of the adoption and implementation of these instruments



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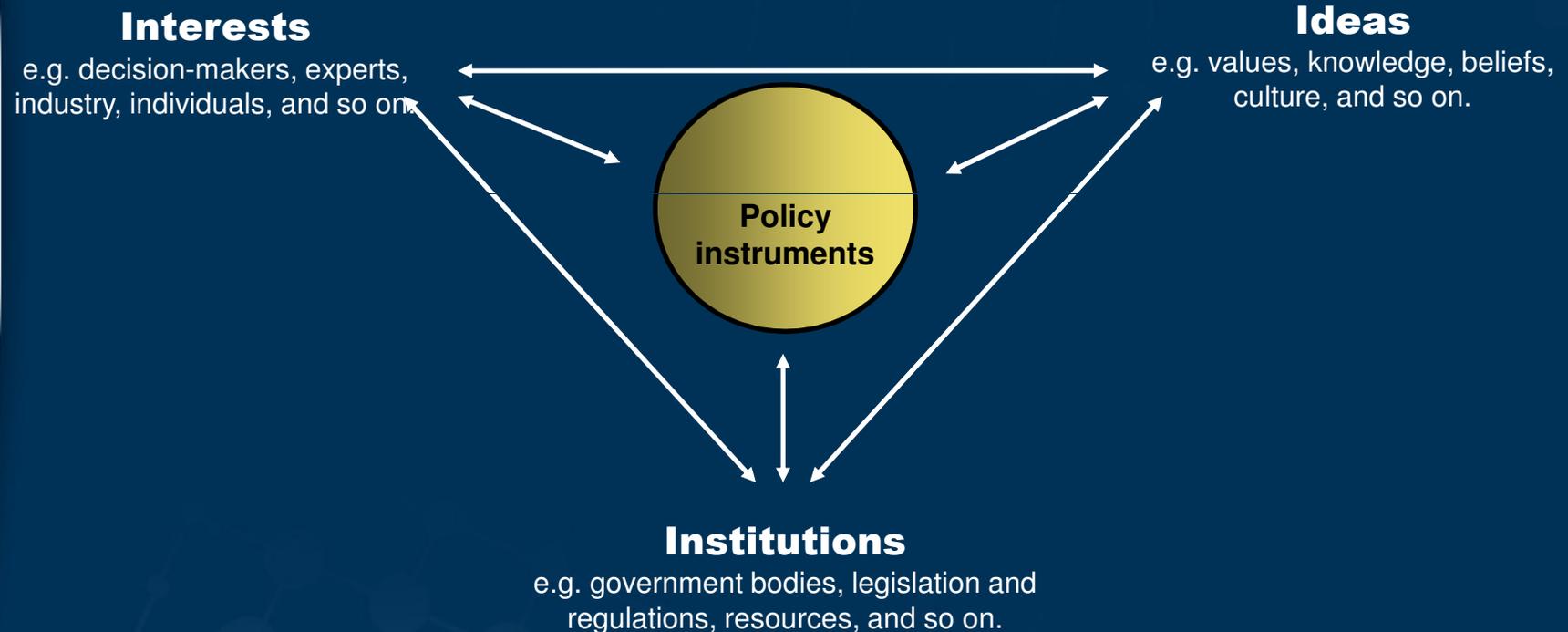
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# Phase 3

## In what context?

- Policy-makers and decision-makers are influenced by considerations that are not exclusively scientific.



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# Phase 3 (continued)

## In what context?

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- Implications related to the realization of objectives
  - Efficacy
  - Fairness (resources and redistribution of the problem)
- Implications related to the means of attaining objectives
  - Costs and cost-effectiveness ratio
  - Administrative feasibility
  - Political feasibility and legitimacy
- Implications related to side effects
  - Public infrastructure
  - Social networks and organizations, i.e. citizenship and democracy



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# PHASE 4

## Deliberative process



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# Phase 4

## Deliberative process

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- What roles can deliberative processes play?
  - Inform and heighten awareness
  - Foster critical examination of an issue
  - Identify the instruments' implications in the Canadian context
  - Integrate and interpret all scientific and contextual data (Lomas et al., 2005)
    - e.g. the Citizens Council of NICE, the Danish Board of Technology consensus conferences, and so on
- The different actors involved in the fight against obesity will discuss the most promising instruments in the Canadian context through a deliberative process.



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# Conclusion

## Challenges and opportunities

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- What types of evidence can shed light on the fight against obesity?
  - We need to broaden the notion of evidence to guide and enlighten political decision-making.
- How can we evaluate and integrate different forms of evidence?
  - We need a new evidence hierarchy and new critical analysis tools.
- How can we analyse and compare different policy instruments?
  - We need to combine knowledge from the areas of public health and political science.
  - Decision-makers are influenced by considerations that are not exclusively scientific, i.e. ideas, interests and institutions.
- How can we integrate the necessary expertise?
  - Deliberative processes that allow for dialogue and critical examination of the issues can facilitate the integration of knowledge that guides decision-making.



# Information

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## François-Pierre Gauvin

National Collaborating Centre for Healthy  
Public Policy

Institut national de santé publique du Québec  
945, avenue Wolfe  
Québec (Québec) Canada  
G1V 5B3

Telephone: 1-418-650-5115, ext. 5537

E-mail: [francois-pierre.gauvin@inspq.qc.ca](mailto:francois-pierre.gauvin@inspq.qc.ca)

Website: [www.healthypublicpolicy.ca](http://www.healthypublicpolicy.ca)

## Marie-Christine Hogue

National Collaborating Centre for Healthy  
Public Policy

Institut national de santé publique du Québec  
945, avenue Wolfe  
Québec (Québec) Canada  
G1V 5B3

Telephone: 1-418-650-5115, ext. 5532

E-mail: [marie-christine.hogue@inspq.qc.ca](mailto:marie-christine.hogue@inspq.qc.ca)

Website: [www.healthypublicpolicy.ca](http://www.healthypublicpolicy.ca)



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