

## Research Briefing N° 48

# Incentives to improve smoking, physical activity, dietary and weight management behaviours: a scoping review of the research evidence

This research considers the effectiveness of incentives to address health behaviours related to smoking, healthy eating, physical activity, obesity and weight management.

**Key words:** incentives; health behaviours; smoking; healthy eating; physical activity; obesity; weight management; diet

The scoping review was carried out by the **Institute of Education's Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre)** in 2009 with funding from the Department of Health.



## Key findings

Findings are of interest to policymakers, research commissioners, practitioners and researchers.

- One hundred and twenty-eight records of trials, randomised controlled trials (RCTs), and systematic reviews were identified. This indicates that there is a considerable body of research concentrated on this topic. The literature was fairly evenly split between those that targeted smoking behaviours and those that addressed weight, diet and activity issues. The majority of studies evaluated financial incentives, though other material incentives were also identified.

## What we did

We carried out a scoping review to provide an overview of the current international research literature that evaluates the effectiveness of incentives to address health behaviours related to smoking, healthy eating, physical activity, obesity and weight management. The aim was to assess the potential nature and size of a body of

research literature, rather than be fully exhaustive.

## How we did it

We searched a number of databases to identify research evidence, screened these for inclusion and descriptively coded 128 studies based on their abstracts.

## Implications

While 27 systematic reviews were identified there remain some noticeable gaps in the evidence base. Consideration should be given to:

- Commissioning a full in-depth systematic review of incentive-focused reviews for improving health outcomes.
- Commissioning systematic reviews of primary research in the following areas:
  - incentives for smoking cessation in disadvantaged populations;
  - incentives for smoking cessation in pregnancy;
  - incentives for weight loss in overweight and obese populations.

## Further information

For the full report see ['Incentives to improve smoking, physical activity, dietary and weight management behaviours: a scoping review of the research evidence'](#)

## Contact

**Principal Investigator:** Professor James Thomas, Department of Childhood, Families and Health, Institute of Education, University of London

**Email:** [j.thomas@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:j.thomas@ioe.ac.uk)

**Phone:** +44 (0)20 7612 6844

**Other team members:** Josephine Kavanagh, Claire Stansfield (Institute of Education)

IOE researchers are based at the IOE's Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre)