

A systematic review of methods, study quality, and results of economic evaluation for childhood and adolescent obesity intervention

Zanganeh, Mandana; Adab, Peymane; Li, Bai; Frew, Emma

DOI:

[10.3390/ijerph16030485](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16030485)

[10.3390/ijerph16030485](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16030485)

License:

Creative Commons: Attribution (CC BY)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):

Zanganeh, M, Adab, P, Li, B & Frew, E 2019, 'A systematic review of methods, study quality, and results of economic evaluation for childhood and adolescent obesity intervention', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 16, no. 3, 485. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16030485>, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16030485>

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

Publisher Rights Statement:

Checked for eligibility 04/02/2019

This is an author-produced, peer-reviewed version of an article forthcoming in International Journal of Environment Research and Public Health.

General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.



1 *Review*

2 **A systematic review of methods, study quality, and** 3 **results of economic evaluation for childhood and** 4 **adolescent obesity intervention**

5 **Mandana Zanganeh, Peymane Adab, Bai Li and Emma Frew***

6 Institute of Applied Health Research, College of Medical and Dental Sciences, University of Birmingham,
7 Birmingham, B15 2TT, UK; MXZ666@bham.ac.uk (M.Z.); P.ADAB@bham.ac.uk (P.A.);

8 B.Li.3@bham.ac.uk (B.L.)

9 * Correspondence: E.Frew@bham.ac.uk; Tel.: 0121-414-3199

10 Received: date; Accepted: date; Published: date

11 **Abstract:** Many suggested policy interventions for childhood and adolescent obesity have costs
12 and effects that fall outside the health care sector. These cross-sectorial costs and consequences
13 have implications for how economic evaluation is applied and although previous systematic
14 reviews have provided a summary of cost-effectiveness, very few have conducted a review of
15 methods applied. We undertook this comprehensive review of economic evaluations, appraising
16 the methods used, assessing the quality of the economic evaluations and summarising
17 cost-effectiveness. Nine electronic databases were searched for full-economic evaluation studies
18 published between January 2001 and April 2017 with no language or country restrictions. 39
19 economic evaluation studies were reviewed and quality assessed. Almost all the studies were from
20 Western countries and methods were found to vary by country, setting and type of intervention.
21 The majority, particularly “behavioural and policy” preventive interventions, were cost-effective,
22 even cost-saving. Only four interventions were not cost effective. This systematic review suggests
23 that economic evaluation of obesity interventions is an expanding area of research. However,
24 methodological heterogeneity makes evidence synthesis challenging. Whilst upstream
25 interventions show promise, an expanded and consistent approach to evaluate cost-effectiveness is
26 needed to capture health and non-health costs and consequences.

27 **Keywords:** cost effectiveness; methods; children; adolescents; obesity; prevention; treatment

29 **1. Introduction**

30 Childhood obesity is a major global public health problem with associated health, social and
31 emotional consequences, as well as long term direct and indirect costs [1-4]. Effective obesity
32 prevention and treatment in children and adolescents is therefore a priority as it is far more
33 cost-effective to prevent the onset of obesity in childhood compared to a lifetime of
34 obesity-associated costs. However, despite an increasing number of intervention studies, there are
35 relatively few published economic evaluations [5-7].

36 In many countries, the scarcity of public resources requires decision makers to seek information
37 on cost-effectiveness as well as clinical effectiveness in the knowledge that the use of resources in
38 one way prevents their use in others [8]. Economic evaluation is a means to aid decisions about
39 public resource allocation [9, 10] and as obesity prevention and treatment often involves lifestyle
40 interventions that have costs and consequences that fall outside the health care sector, a societal
41 perspective for evaluation is usually recommended [10]. This means that all relevant resource
42 use/costs and consequences are measured, outlining how these fit within a given sector, such as
43 health, education or the wider community [11]. However, when incorporating costs and outcomes

44 that span across multiple sectors, it is not always clear how much society is willing to pay for a
45 'non-health' effect caused by an intervention funded from a 'health care budget'. Also, the valuation
46 of resources for which no market exists, such as informal care, or patient time costs, requires specific
47 methods [8].

48 Seven recent reviews [12-18] have summarised the cost-effectiveness of obesity prevention
49 and/or treatment interventions in young people however none were designed to offer a rigorous
50 review of methods applied for economic evaluation. Five reviews had language restrictions [12-15,
51 17] and four excluded studies that were conducted in developing countries [12, 13, 15, 17], limiting
52 global interpretation. Only two reviews appraised methods for handling inter-sectoral costs [13, 17].
53 Just three of the reviews used established criteria e.g. Drummond checklist [19] to assess the quality
54 of the primary studies [13, 14, 17]. The search strategy was inadequate (e.g. search terms not fully
55 reported) in three reviews [12, 15, 20], and in the remaining four there were omissions of relevant
56 databases, which means that relevant studies could have been missed [13, 14, 16, 17]. Furthermore,
57 the most recent review, which only focused on interventions in pre-school children, included studies
58 reported up to November 2015 and, at least 3 new economic evaluation studies of childhood obesity
59 interventions have been published since then [21-23].

60 This paper reports on a systematic review of published economic evaluations of obesity
61 prevention and/or treatment interventions in children and adolescents (0-19 years) with the primary
62 objective of appraising the methods used and assessing the quality of the economic evaluations
63 using the Drummond checklist [19]. A secondary objective was to undertake a narrative synthesis of
64 the evidence of the cost-effectiveness.

65 2. Materials and Methods

66 The systematic review follows the reporting guidelines of Preferred Reporting Items for
67 Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) [24] and a completed PRISMA checklist is
68 presented in Section A (see Supplementary Material). The protocol is registered with the
69 international prospective register of systematic reviews (PROSPERO) database ref
70 (CRD42017062236) and has previously been published [25].

71 2.1. Literature Search

72 The following electronic health economics/biomedical databases were searched: MEDLINE
73 (Ovid); EMBASE (Ovid); Web of Science; CINAHL Plus; EconLit; PsycINFO; Cochrane Database of
74 Systematic Reviews (CDSR); Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects (DARE); the National
75 Health Service Economic Evaluation Database (NHS EED); Health Technology Assessment (HTA)
76 and Cost-Effectiveness Analysis (CEA) Registry. The following sources were also used to identify
77 potential additional studies: Google Scholar; relevant National Institute for Health and Care
78 Excellence (NICE) guidelines; the reference lists of eligible studies and review articles; and Grey
79 literature such as OpenSIGLE, National Obesity Observatory, NHS Evidence, National Technical
80 Information Service, Healthcare Management Information Consortium (HMIC) and RePEC
81 (Economic Working papers) database. The search was conducted in May 2017 and studies were
82 sought between January 2001 and April 2017. The year 2001 was chosen since the first study
83 evaluating the cost-effectiveness of a childhood obesity treatment intervention was published then
84 followed 2 years later by the first economic evaluation of a childhood obesity prevention
85 intervention [16]. Search strategies included Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms and text words
86 of key papers that were identified beforehand. The search terms and text words were adapted for
87 use within other bibliographic databases. The full search strategy is presented in Section B (see
88 Supplementary Material).

89 2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

90 Economic evaluations were included or excluded based on the following criteria:

91 Types of study: Primary full economic evaluations were included (studies in which both the
92 costs and outcomes of the alternatives are examined and in which a comparison of two or more
93 interventions or case alternatives are undertaken) including trial-based and model-based (using trial
94 data) evaluations. Partial economic evaluations; qualitative studies; conference abstracts; and study
95 protocols were excluded.

96 Participants/ population: Children and adolescents aged 0-19 years at the start of the
97 intervention and/or their parents/guardians were included. Family based interventions were also
98 included when the target participants were the children. Economic evaluations undertaken within
99 any country context were included. Interventions to tackle obesity due to a secondary cause (e.g.
100 Prader-Willi syndrome) were excluded.

101 Intervention(s), exposure(s): All behavioural (focused on individual behaviour change
102 techniques), environmental (focused on modifying the local environment) or policy (focused on
103 population-wide legislative or fiscal action) interventions for the treatment or prevention of
104 overweight/obesity in children and/or adolescents were included. Pharmacological or surgical
105 interventions were excluded.

106 Comparator(s)/control: Only studies with a clearly defined comparator were included with no
107 restrictions on the types of comparator(s).

108 Outcome(s): No restrictions on outcomes measures. Potentially relevant outcomes were:
109 Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs); Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs); effectiveness
110 outcomes such as kilogramme weight loss; % Body Fat; Body Mass Index (BMI) z-score; waist
111 circumference; overweight and obesity cases avoided; additional minute of Moderate to Vigorous
112 Physical Activity (MVPA); increase in overall physical activity level and Metabolic Equivalent
113 (MET) hour gained.

114 Other criteria: There were no restrictions based on language.

115 2.3. Study Selection Procedure

116 The review followed a two-stage method. First, the main researcher and an independent
117 researcher individually screened titles and abstracts of identified publications against the selection
118 criteria. If in doubt, the full text version was requested. Second, full-text papers were reviewed by
119 both researchers and a final decision made with respect to the inclusion/exclusion criteria. There was
120 85% agreement between the 2 reviewers. Any disagreements between the reviewers over the
121 eligibility of specific studies were resolved by discussion between all authors. To aid study selection
122 and analysis of non-English language articles, translation either in part or in whole was undertaken
123 by academic colleagues with the appropriate language skills. The literature search results were
124 managed using Endnote 7 (Thomson Reuters).

125 2.4. Data Extraction

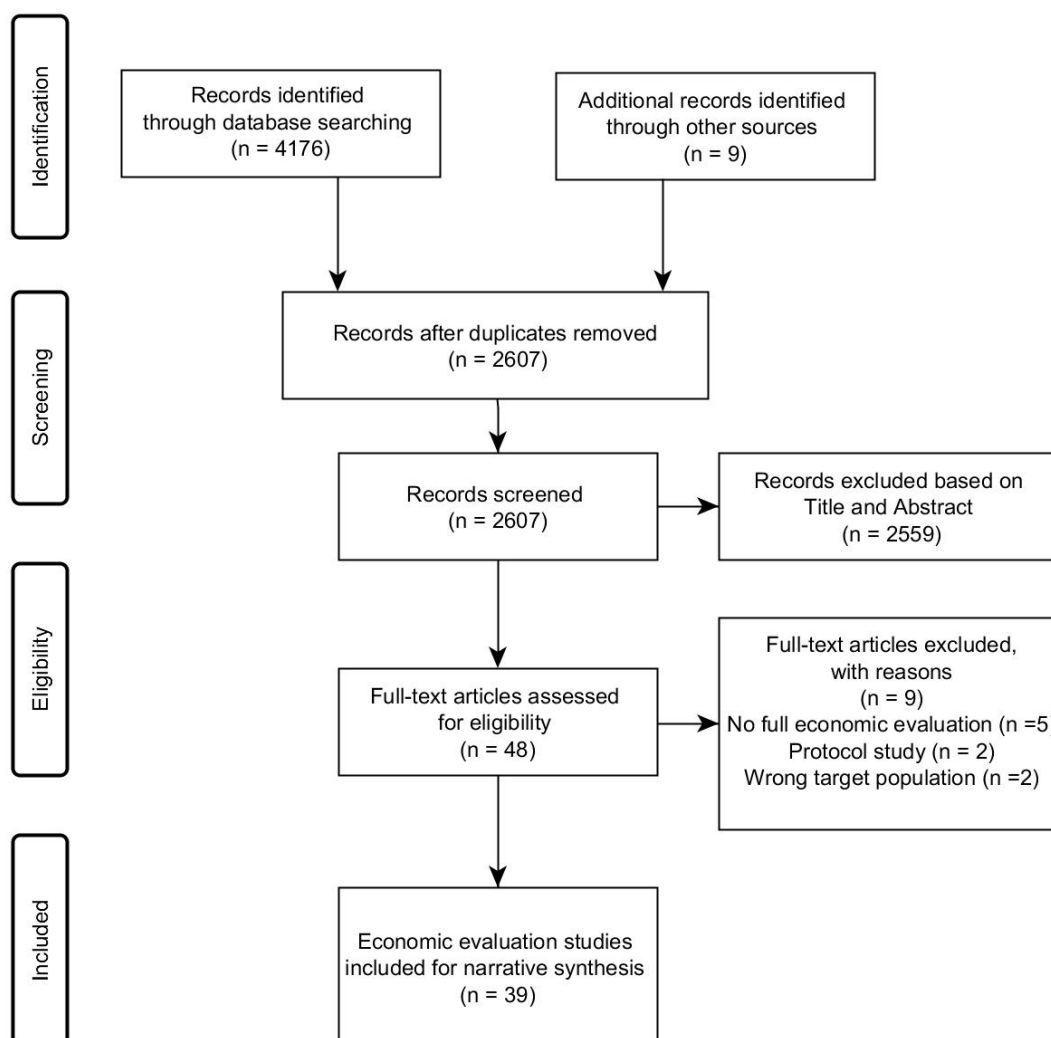
126 The study characteristics and findings were recorded using a standardised, pre-piloted data
127 extraction form (see Tables S1 (i) – S1 (iv) and Tables S2-4 (i) – S2-4 (iv) in Supplementary Material).
128 This process was checked for completeness and accuracy by an independent researcher. Any
129 discrepancies between the reviewers over the data extraction process was identified and resolved by
130 discussion or by consensus with all authors.

131 2.5. Quality Assessment of Included Studies

132 The quality of the economic evaluations were judged against standard criteria (Drummond
133 checklist) [19], see Table S5 (see Supplementary Material). Quality assessment of the included
134 studies was independently checked for completeness and accuracy by an independent researcher
135 and any discrepancies were resolved by discussion with all authors.

136 3. Results

137 From the 4,185 references initially identified, 39 economic evaluations were included – see
 138 Figure 1. The most common reasons for exclusion were the lack of (full) economic evaluations, being
 139 a protocol study, or including an ineligible target population.



140
 141 **Figure 1.** PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow
 142 diagram.

143 *3.1. Details about Study Context*

144 Full details about study context are presented in Tables S1 (i) – S1 (iv) (see Supplementary
 145 Material), and summarised in Table 1.

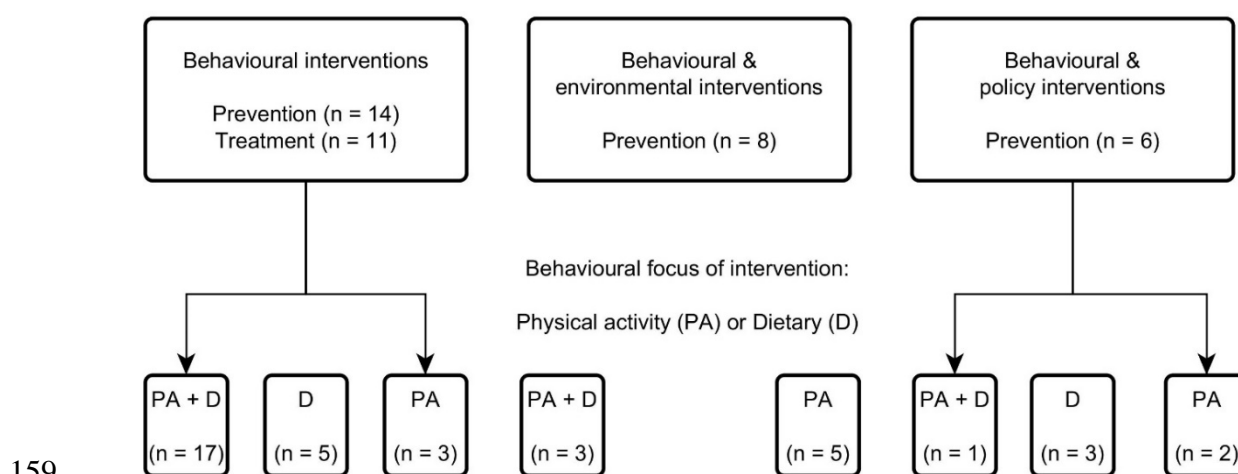
146 **Table 1.** Summary of general characteristics of the studies.

Study characteristics		Number of studies identified (%)
Year of publication		
	2001-2009	17 (44)
	2010-2017	22 (56)
Study approach		
Trial-based	Prevention	9 (23)
	Treatment	7 (18)
Model-based	Prevention	19 (49)
	Treatment	4 (10)
Comparator selected		

Usual care	33 (85)
Another intervention	6 (15)
Country	
High-income	
Australia	15 (38.5)
New Zealand	2 (5)
The USA	12 (31.5)
Canada	1 (2.5)
The UK	4 (10)
Germany	2 (5)
Finland	1 (2.5)
Spain	1 (2.5)
Low and middle-income	
China	1 (2.5)
Setting	
School Prevention	21 (54)
US/Australian state	5 (13)
Community	1 (2.5)
Home	1 (2.5)
Clinical Treatment	9 (23)
School	1 (2.5)
Community	1 (2.5)

147 3.1.1. Intervention and Comparator

148 Approximately half of the economic evaluations (23/39) were model-based [12, 23, 26-41]
 149 compared to trial-based evaluations. A range of interventions were identified, all containing
 150 individual behaviour change elements (Figure 2). A large proportion (25/39) (including all treatment
 151 interventions) were focused exclusively on behaviour change techniques, the rest combined
 152 individual behaviour change elements with either an environmental component (modifying the
 153 local environment e.g. active school transport) [22, 30-34, 42, 43] or a policy component
 154 (population-wide legislative or fiscal interventions such as banning unhealthy food advertising or a
 155 physical education policy) [26, 28, 29, 36, 39, 44]. Approximately half of the interventions (21/39; 12
 156 prevention and 9 treatment) targeted a combination of physical activity and dietary behaviours [12,
 157 21, 27, 33, 37-43, 45-51], the rest focused on either physical activity [22, 26, 30-32, 34, 44, 52-54] or
 158 dietary habits only [12, 23, 28, 29, 36, 55].



159
160

Figure 2. Summary of the interventions.

161 The intensity of the interventions differed considerably. For prevention interventions, this
 162 ranged from one session per 3 months [45] to approximately 2 sessions per month [52]; and for
 163 treatment interventions, ranged from one [21] to 12 sessions per week [47]. The duration of the

164 interventions also differed, ranging from 8 months [54] to 4 years [53] for prevention studies; and
165 from 3 months [21] to 1 year [47] for treatment studies. Overall therefore, the treatment interventions
166 were generally more intensive but delivered over a shorter time period compared to prevention
167 interventions. The comparison or control group was not always clearly specified but was assumed to
168 be “usual care” in most of the studies (33/39) and often the studies did not justify their rationale for
169 choosing the comparator.

170 3.1.2. Country and Setting

171 The evaluations were spread across a wide range of countries and study settings. The vast
172 majority (38/39) originated from high-income countries, mainly Australasia (Australia (n=15) [12, 22,
173 29-33, 41, 45, 51] and New Zealand (n=2) [35, 42]), with 13 from North America (USA (n=12) [23,
174 26-28, 36-39, 43, 44, 47, 50], Canada (n=1) [48]) and 8 from Europe (UK (n=4) [21, 34, 40, 49], Germany
175 (n=2) [52, 53], Finland (n=1) [55], Spain (n=1) [54]). Only one study was from a developing country
176 context - China [46]. In terms of study setting, the majority of prevention interventions (21/28) were
177 school-based [22, 23, 27, 30-33, 35, 37, 38, 42, 43, 46, 50, 52-54] and for treatment interventions, most
178 (9/11) took place in clinical settings [12, 21, 40, 41, 47-49, 51, 55].

179 3.2. Review of Economic Evaluation Methods

180 A detailed account of the economic evaluation methods are presented in Tables S2-4 (i) – S2-4
181 (iv) (see Supplementary Material).

182 3.2.1. Type of Economic Evaluation and Measures of Effectiveness

183 The majority of studies that conducted a Cost-Effectiveness Analysis (CEA) used raw or
184 standardised BMI as a measure of clinical outcome (26/39) (18 prevention and 8 treatment), whilst
185 other studies used one or more measures from: cases of overweight/obesity prevented; unit increase
186 in MET minutes; reduction in body fat or waist circumference. Approximately half of the studies
187 that undertook a CEA also conducted a Cost-Utility Analysis (CUA) [21, 28-34, 36, 41] with QALYs
188 as the primary outcome measure. The review found that the vast majority of trial-based economic
189 evaluations (15/16) did not use QALYs/DALYs whereas most model-based evaluations (n=20)
190 tended to report QALYs/DALYs as the primary economic outcome. When QALYs were used, the
191 age of the participants was between 6 and 11 years in the trial-based economic evaluation [21], and
192 between 2 and 19 years in the model-based economic evaluations.

193 A pattern with preferred type of economic evaluation by country context was apparent. Within
194 Australasia (13/17) a CUA or a combination of CUA and CEA [12, 29-33, 35, 41] was most popular,
195 whereas the majority of studies from North America (7/13) [26, 39, 43, 44, 47, 48, 50], and the only
196 study from China [46] conducted a CEA only. Across Europe, only UK-based studies used CUA [21,
197 34]. In terms of study setting, a CEA was most common in clinical settings (7/9), whereas within
198 school settings a mixed approach was applied with around half conducting a CEA (12/22). There
199 was no clear pattern found in terms of approach taken to evaluate prevention or treatment
200 interventions.

201 3.2.2. Evaluation Perspective Taken

202 Most (35/39) studies clearly reported the study perspective. The majority (n=29) were from a
203 societal perspective. Interestingly, none of the UK studies [21, 34, 40, 49], compared to most of those
204 conducted within Australia and the USA, applied a societal perspective. Two studies reported using
205 a health care perspective, but from the data reported it was clear that wider societal costs were
206 included within a secondary analysis [21, 51].

207 For all interventions that included either a policy or environmental component (12/14), the
208 perspective was societal, whereas for interventions focused exclusively on individual behaviour
209 change a combination of societal (17/25) and healthcare (6/25) perspectives was undertaken. A

210 societal perspective was also adopted by the vast majority of interventions implemented in school
211 settings (19/22).

212 3.2.3. Time Horizon Considered and Type of Modelling Approach Taken

213 The time durations for the trial-based economic evaluations were predicted by the period of the
214 trial. Of interest this ranged from 8 months [54] to 6 years [53] in the prevention studies; and from
215 10 months [50] to 15 months [51] for the treatment interventions. For the model-based evaluations,
216 the time horizon was more at the analysts discretion and within this review ranged from at least 10
217 years (n=5) [26, 28, 36, 38, 39] to a lifetime (15/23) [12, 23, 29-33, 35, 40, 41]. The time horizon was also
218 found to be much shorter within clinical settings (6/9) [21, 47-49, 51, 55] compared to the other study
219 settings such as schools for example. The majority of the studies did not justify their choice of time
220 horizon.

221 With respect to modelling, the vast majority of model-based studies (18/23) applied Markov
222 modelling [12, 26, 28-33, 35, 36, 39-41] compared to decision analytic modelling [23, 27, 34, 37, 38].
223 The majority of the model-based studies did not justify their model choice and the description of
224 model details was suboptimal in most of them.

225 3.2.4. Choice of Discount Rate

226 For the majority of the trial-based studies (10/16) (4 prevention and 6 treatment), discounting
227 was not appropriate as the time horizons considered were relatively short (less than one year) [21,
228 43, 46-50, 52, 54, 55]. For all the trial-based studies of more than one year, all reported using a
229 discount rate in accordance with the relevant country guidelines apart from one prevention trial
230 from New Zealand [42], which used a 5% discount rate per year for costs, rather than the 3.5%
231 discount rate per year for both costs and outcomes recommended [56]. Most model-based studies
232 (22/23) applied a discount rate for both costs and outcomes (3% per year for Australia (n=12) [12,
233 29-33, 41], the USA (n=8) [23, 26-28, 36-39] and the UK (n=1) [40], and 3.5% per year for New Zealand
234 (n=1) [35]. Interestingly, the rates used for studies from Australia and the UK were not in accordance
235 with their respective country guidelines (which is 5% per year for Australia according to PBAC and
236 3.5% per year for the UK according to NICE) [57, 58]. However, different state governments in
237 Australia recommend different rates and the discount rate used in the included Australian and UK
238 studies was consistent with the US panel recommendations [59]. Most of the studies did not justify
239 their choice of discount rate.

240 3.2.5. Methods for Collecting and Estimating Resource Use/Costs

241 Half of the trial-based evaluations (8/16) (4 prevention and 4 treatment) reported their methods
242 for collecting resource use [21, 22, 45, 47, 49, 51-53], while only 10 out of 23 model-based evaluations
243 (9 prevention and 1 treatment) did so [23, 26, 28, 30-33, 36, 39, 41].

244 As expected, the choice of inclusion of a particular type of cost varied considerably according to
245 the study purpose, perspective, setting and the nature of the intervention being evaluated. Costs
246 tended to be categorised into programme delivery, direct medical (e.g. healthcare visits), direct
247 non-medical (e.g. travel time/cost for participants) and indirect (e.g. productivity losses because of
248 parents' absence from work). In line with recommendations for CEA [60], the development/set up
249 costs were not considered in the vast majority of studies, apart from one trial-based prevention
250 study from the USA [44].

251 Of the 9 studies (5 prevention and 4 treatment) that included indirect costs incurred by parents
252 [21, 30, 31, 33, 41, 43, 47, 51, 53], these were mainly from Australia (n=5) and most of them were for
253 preventive "behavioural" interventions within a school-based setting (5/9). Also, direct non-medical
254 costs were reported by 4 prevention studies from Australia [30, 33, 41, 51] and 1 treatment study
255 from the USA [47]. Most of these types of costs (3/5) were for "behavioural" interventions
256 implemented within a clinical setting.

257 3.2.6. Sensitivity Analysis Undertaken

258 The majority of the trial-based studies (10/16) conducted a deterministic sensitivity analysis to
259 assess the robustness of the results [21, 22, 42, 43, 45, 51-55]. Most of the model-based studies (22/23)
260 apart from the study by Pringle et al (2010) from the UK [34], conducted at least one type of
261 sensitivity analysis with the majority (n=20) applying both deterministic and probabilistic sensitivity
262 analysis in line with recommendations. Half of these studies however did not justify the choice of
263 covariates for the sensitivity analysis.

264 3.3. Narrative Synthesis of Cost-Effectiveness Evidence

265 The most common method for presenting cost-effectiveness evidence was the Incremental
266 Cost-Effectiveness Ratio (ICER) (30/39). The vast majority of the studies (33/37), excluding the CCA
267 ones, reported results that were cost-effective. Some of these (13 of the model-based
268 prevention/treatment studies including 5 by Carter et al (2009)), [12, 28, 29, 34, 36-40] illustrated cost
269 saving results. For instance, Long et al (2015) concluded that a sugar-sweetened beverage excise tax
270 would increase benefits in terms of DALYs averted and result in healthcare cost savings in the USA
271 [28]. Almost half of these 13 studies that illustrated cost-savings were from Australia, followed by 5
272 from the USA and 2 from the UK. None of the trial-based evaluations reported cost saving results,
273 probably due to shorter time horizons. Whilst the findings are not directly comparable between
274 studies due to the heterogeneous nature of the methods used, all of the studies which evaluated
275 interventions targeting only dietary habits (8/8) and the majority of the studies targeting both
276 physical activity and dietary habits (19/21) indicated cost-effective or cost saving results. However,
277 the studies which focused on only physical activity indicated a proportionally smaller number of
278 cost-effective or cost saving results (7/10). Furthermore, the evidence suggests that the majority of
279 behavioural interventions supported by a policy intervention (4/6) were cost-saving [28, 29, 36, 39].

280 A small number of studies (n=4) [21, 30-32] reported interventions to not be cost-effective. The
281 UK trial-based treatment study [21], which targeted a combination of physical activity and dietary
282 habits with the aim to reduce weight gain in children with obesity remained not cost-effective using
283 a CEA/CUA approach regardless of the choice of perspective. Also, the 3 model-based studies that
284 targeted only physical activity were not cost-effective, for example, the "Walking School Bus"
285 programme which had a high cost of delivery coupled with low participation rates [30].

286 3.4. Quality Assessment of the Included Studies

287 The quality of reporting the economic evaluations was assessed using the Drummond checklist.
288 Full details of the quality assessment are presented in Tables S6 (i) – S6 (iv) (see Supplementary
289 Material). None of the included studies fulfilled all of the quality criteria however only a small
290 number of the studies were categorised as poor. One challenge regarding the quality assessment was
291 that quality was judged based on the published data only and there might be a difference in what
292 has been reported and what has actually been done. So a bad scoring study might just be due to lack
293 of transparency rather than lack of quality.

294 Certain criteria were simply not applicable to each respective study (e.g. items 12–15, due to
295 different perspectives chosen), while others were not reported. The three criteria which were least
296 well addressed were the rationale for the comparator, the justification for the choice of discount rate,
297 and the model choice. Whilst the time horizon for each study was generally well specified, most
298 studies omitted to provide reasons for choice. Additionally, approximately half of the studies did
299 not justify the choice of economic evaluation nor offered justification for what was explored within a
300 sensitivity analysis.

301 4. Discussion

302 To the best of our knowledge this is the first study to conduct a review of the methods for
303 economic evaluation and to determine how these methods vary by setting, country and intervention
304 design.

305 The review identified some emerging patterns. We found that among the published economic
306 evaluations, there was no consistent measure of outcomes. Around half of the studies reported
307 clinical (e.g. BMI), rather than health-related outcome measures commonly used within economic
308 evaluation (QALYs/DALYs). This suggests that the measurement of QALYs/DALYs within obesity
309 trials is not firmly established. This heterogeneity of outcome measures will hinder comparability of
310 cost-effectiveness.

311 No evaluation applied a Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) approach. Consideration of broader
312 outcomes going beyond the health sector allows for inclusion of costs and effects from multiple
313 sectors and is particularly relevant for obesity intervention. This is an emerging area of
314 development within economic evaluation and efforts are being made to adapt methodologies to
315 promote the use of CBA [61]. These approaches have been recommended by the UK Treasury
316 guidance to evaluate (usually non-health) public sector projects [62].

317 Model-based evaluations offer the opportunity to improve the generalisability of results as they
318 combine data from a variety of sources. However the findings from five of the model-based
319 evaluations identified within this review were based on small samples [23, 27, 34, 37, 38] and only
320 one of these offered data based on a lifetime horizon. Furthermore, all of the model-based
321 evaluations were for interventions that targeted individual health behaviours and were therefore
322 highly dependent on cultural, infrastructural and other system-related aspects. So the
323 generalisability of results to other contexts, particularly from developed to developing country
324 settings, would be questionable [63]. The majority of the papers did not make explicit mention of
325 procedures for checking their models and no study assessed the sensitivity of their results to the
326 choice of model-type. Despite associated assumptions with modelling studies, the studies evaluated
327 are important as model-based health economic evaluations are today widely accepted as
328 policy-making tools that can inform resource allocation decisions. Almost half of the model-based
329 studies chose a lifetime perspective and the vast majority of them applied Markov modelling.

330 Most trial-based and model-based evaluations in this review applied recommended discount
331 rates in accordance with the relevant country guidelines. Methods for collecting resource use and the
332 type of cost included were found to vary across the studies. In particular, the indirect costs of
333 overweight and obesity (e.g. productivity losses) were not generally collected alongside the trials. It
334 is considered good practice to report results both with and without indirect costs. Including indirect
335 costs (e.g. costs incurred by families) has the potential to alter the treatment recommendations.

336 The narrative synthesis of the economic evidence and the quality assessment of the included
337 studies are useful for informing health economists/modellers and the direction for future research in
338 this area. In terms of judging cost-effectiveness of interventions, context-specific assessment is
339 problematic as there are different thresholds for cost-effectiveness in different countries. For
340 example, in the UK, NICE recommends a threshold willingness to pay of £20,000-£30,000 per QALY
341 [64], by contrast in Australia the recommendation is AU\$ 50,000 per QALY [30] and in many
342 countries there are no clearly defined thresholds at all. Whilst most interventions in this review
343 appear cost-effective using standard rules of cost-effectiveness, there is substantial variation by
344 intervention design.

345 4.1. Comparison with Previous Systematic Reviews

346 Our finding that most interventions were cost-effective or even cost-saving, is similar to those
347 reported by two other reviews [14, 20], with some overlap between included studies. Other reviews
348 have focused on particular age groups (e.g. pre-schoolers [13]), specific interventions (e.g. only
349 physical activity [17]), or particular outcomes (e.g. anthropometric measurements [13]). Two
350 additional reviews from Australia [12] and the US [15] used the Assessing Cost-Effectiveness (ACE)
351 obesity approach to summarise and compare the cost-effectiveness of a range of interventions.
352 However, none of the previous studies reviewed the methods of the economic evaluations in the
353 way we have outlined.

354 4.2. Strengths and Limitations of this Review

355 One of the important strengths of this review is the comprehensive search strategy applied
356 encompassing a broad range of electronic bibliographic databases of published studies and the grey
357 literature (six additional studies were identified). Furthermore, the results were not limited to only
358 those published in English (two non-English publications identified) and there were no country
359 restrictions (there was one publication from china as a developing country), resulting in a more
360 complete review than those published previously. Also, the formal quality assessment of the
361 economic evaluations undertaken adds strength to the conclusions. The vast majority of the studies
362 were found to be of very good reporting quality.

363 The review had some limitations. As we focused on full economic evaluations, some important
364 data contained within partial evaluations may have been missed. Further limitations relate to the
365 shortcomings of the included studies and underlying evidence base. There was heterogeneity in
366 both the methods used and with the type of intervention being evaluated, which made synthesising
367 the evidence base challenging. Not all included studies used the same definition of obesity, which
368 may impact on the results. Most of the included studies reported an economic evaluation for an
369 intervention that had previously been reported as clinically effective. It is possible that any trial
370 which had ineffective results did not conduct an economic evaluation or, if they did, failed to get it
371 published, introducing potential publication bias.

372 5. Conclusions

373 This systematic review suggests that current economic evaluations are mainly set in developed
374 countries and the majority focus on the prevention of obesity in children, compared to treatment.
375 Our findings show that the majority of published economic evaluations are for interventions with an
376 individual behaviour change component. The majority, particularly “behavioural and policy”
377 preventive interventions, were cost-effective, even cost-saving. However the review found
378 heterogeneity with respect to methods applied. So, to improve the evidence base further and to
379 enhance comparability across interventions, we recommend a consistent and expanded form of
380 economic evaluation which captures both health and non-health costs and consequences beyond
381 health-gain.

382 **Supplementary Materials:** Additional supporting information may be found online in the supplementary
383 material file for this article. This file includes: Section A: Completed PRISMA checklist; Section B: Search
384 strategy; Tables S1 (i) – S1 (iv): Data extraction (Details about study context); Tables S2-4 (i) – S2-4 (iv): Data
385 extraction (Detailed account of the economic evaluation methods); Table S5: Drummond checklist for critically
386 appraising relevant studies; and Tables S6 (i) – S6 (iv): Quality assessment of the included studies.

387 **Author Contributions:** MZ, PA, BL and EF led the development of the design of this study. PA, BL and EF
388 provided methodological advice and supervised the study. MZ conducted the literature search. Full-text
389 articles were assessed by MZ for eligibility. MZ extracted the data and assessed the quality of the included
390 studies. Any disagreements between the main researcher and the independent researcher (acknowledged
391 above) over the eligibility of specific studies, the data extraction process and the quality assessment process
392 were resolved by discussion between all authors. MZ analysed the data and interpreted the results. MZ drafted
393 the manuscript. All authors were actively involved in revising the drafts of the manuscript and interpreting the
394 results critically for important intellectual content. All authors read, commented on drafts and approved the
395 final manuscript.

396 **Funding:** This article represents an independent research project funded by an internal University of
397 Birmingham PhD studentship (the College of Medical and Dental Sciences Studentship) and the systematic
398 review forms part of that PhD project. The funder had no role in study design, data collection, data analysis,
399 data interpretation, or writing of the manuscript or submitting for publication. The views expressed in this
400 systematic review are those of the authors.

401 **Acknowledgments:** The authors would like to thank: independent researcher, James Hall, for assisting with
402 study selection, data extraction and quality assessment of the included studies; Samantha Cruz Rivera and
403 Antje Lindenmeyer for translating Spanish and German articles; Susan Bayliss and Jon Andrews for applying
404 design the search strategy.

405 **Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest with respect to the research,
406 authorship, and/or publication of this article.

407 **References**

- 408 1. Au N. The health care cost implications of overweight and obesity during childhood. *Health Serv Res.*
409 2012;47(2):655-76.
- 410 2. Neovius K, Johansson K, Kark M, Neovius M. Obesity status and sick leave: a systematic review. *Obesity*
411 *reviews.* 2009;10(1):17-27.
- 412 3. Basterfield L, Jones AR, Parkinson KN, et al. Physical activity, diet and BMI in children aged 6–8 years: a
413 cross-sectional analysis. *BMJ Open.* 2014;4(6):e005001.
- 414 4. Lobstein T, Baur L, Uauy R. Obesity in children and young people: a crisis in public health. *Obesity*
415 *reviews.* 2004;5(s1):4-85.
- 416 5. Blake-Lamb TL, Locks LM, Perkins ME, Baidal JAW, Cheng ER, Taveras EM. Interventions for childhood
417 obesity in the first 1,000 days a systematic review. *American journal of preventive medicine.* 2016;50(6):780-9.
- 418 6. Seburg EM, Olson-Bullis BA, Bredeson DM, Hayes MG, Sherwood NE. A review of primary care-based
419 childhood obesity prevention and treatment interventions. *Curr.* 2015;4(2):157-73.
- 420 7. Wang Y, Cai L, Wu Y, et al. What childhood obesity prevention programmes work? A systematic review
421 and meta - analysis. *Obesity Reviews.* 2015;16(7):547-65.
- 422 8. Palmer S, Raftery J. Economics notes: Opportunity cost. *BMJ: British Medical Journal.* 1999;318(7197):1551.
- 423 9. Ananthapavan J, Sacks G, Moodie M, Carter R. Economics of obesity—Learning from the past to
424 contribute to a better future. *International journal of environmental research and public health.* 2014;11(4):4007-25.
- 425 10. Frew E. Economic evaluation of childhood obesity interventions: Reflections and suggestions.
426 *Pharmacoeconomics.* 2016;34(8):733-40.
- 427 11. Johannesson M, Jonsson B, Jonsson L, Kobelt G, Zethraeus N. Why should economic evaluations of
428 medical innovations have a societal perspective? 2009 [Available from:
429 <https://www.ohe.org/publications/why-should-economic-evaluations-medical-innovations-have-societal-persp>
430 [ective.](https://www.ohe.org/publications/why-should-economic-evaluations-medical-innovations-have-societal-persp)
- 431 12. Carter R, Moodie M, Markwick A, et al. Assessing Cost-Effectiveness in Obesity (ACE-Obesity): an
432 overview of the ACE approach, economic methods and cost results. *Bmc Public Health.* 2009;9.
- 433 13. Doring N, Mayer S, Rasmussen F, Sonntag D. Economic evaluation of obesity prevention in early
434 childhood: Methods, limitations and recommendations. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public*
435 *Health.* 2016;13 (9) (no pagination)(911).
- 436 14. Erdol S, Mazzucco W, Boccia S. Cost effectiveness analysis of childhood obesity primary prevention
437 programmes: a systematic review. *Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Public Health.* 2014;11(3).
- 438 15. Gortmaker SL, Long MW, Resch SC, et al. Cost Effectiveness of Childhood Obesity Interventions
439 Evidence and Methods for CHOICES. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine.* 2015;49(1):102-11.
- 440 16. John J, Wolfenstetter SB, Wenig CM. An economic perspective on childhood obesity: recent findings on
441 cost of illness and cost effectiveness of interventions. *Nutrition.* 2012;28(9):829-39.
- 442 17. Korber K. Quality assessment of economic evaluations of health promotion programs for children and
443 adolescents—a systematic review using the example of physical activity. *Health Econ Rev.* 2015;5(1):35.

- 444 18. Lobstein T, Jackson-Leach R, Moodie ML, et al. Child and adolescent obesity: part of a bigger picture. *The*
445 *Lancet*. 2015;385(9986):2510-20.
- 446 19. Drummond MF, Sculpher MJ, Claxton K, Stoddart GL, Torrance GW. *Methods for the economic*
447 *evaluation of health care programmes*: Oxford university press; 2015.
- 448 20. Lobstein T, Jackson-Leach R, Moodie ML, et al. Child and adolescent obesity: part of a bigger picture.
449 *Lancet*. 2015;385(9986):2510-20.
- 450 21. Robertson W, Fleming J, Kamal A, et al. Randomised controlled trial evaluating the effectiveness and
451 cost-effectiveness of 'families for health', a family-based childhood obesity treatment intervention delivered in
452 a community setting for ages 6 to 11 years. *Health Technology Assessment*. 2017;21(1):i, 179.
- 453 22. Sutherland R, Reeves P, Campbell E, et al. Cost effectiveness of a multi-component school-based physical
454 activity intervention targeting adolescents: the 'Physical Activity 4 Everyone' cluster randomized trial.
455 *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*. 2016;13.
- 456 23. Grazioplene MM, Koch PA, Wang YC, Lee Gray H, Contento IR. Cost-effectiveness of a Nutrition Education
457 Curriculum Intervention in Elementary Schools. *J Nutr Educ Behav*. 2016.
- 458 24. Liberati A, Altman DG, Tetzlaff J, et al. The PRISMA statement for reporting systematic reviews and
459 meta-analyses of studies that evaluate health care interventions: explanation and elaboration. *PLoS medicine*.
460 2009;6(7):e1000100.
- 461 25. Zanganeh M, Adab P, Li B, Frew E. Protocol for a systematic review of methods and cost-effectiveness
462 findings of economic evaluations of obesity prevention and/or treatment interventions in children and
463 adolescents. *BMC Systematic Reviews*. 2018;54(7):1-7.
- 464 26. Barrett JL, Gortmaker SL, Long MW, et al. Cost Effectiveness of an Elementary School Active Physical
465 Education Policy. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2015;49(1):148-59.
- 466 27. Brown IHS, Perez A, Li YP, Hoelscher DM, Kelder SH, Rivera R. The cost-effectiveness of a school-based
467 overweight program. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*. 2007;4 (no pagination)(47).
- 468 28. Long MW, Gortmaker SL, Ward ZJ, et al. Cost Effectiveness of a Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Excise Tax in
469 the US. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2015;49(1):112-23.
- 470 29. Magnus A, Haby MM, Carter R, Swinburn B. The cost-effectiveness of removing television advertising of
471 high-fat and/or high-sugar food and beverages to Australian children. *International Journal of Obesity*.
472 2009;33(10):1094-102.
- 473 30. Moodie M, Haby M, Galvin L, Swinburn B, Carter R. Cost-effectiveness of active transport for primary
474 school children - Walking School Bus program. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*.
475 2009;6.
- 476 31. Moodie ML, Carter RC, Swinburn BA, Haby MM. The Cost-effectiveness of Australia's Active
477 After-school Communities Program. *Obesity*. 2010;18(8):1585-92.
- 478 32. Moodie M, Haby MM, Swinburn B, Carter R. Assessing cost-effectiveness in obesity: Active transport
479 program for primary school children- TravelSMART Schools Curriculum program. *Journal of Physical Activity*
480 *and Health*. 2011;8(4):503-15.
- 481 33. Moodie ML, Herbert JK, de Silva-Sanigorski AM, et al. The Cost-Effectiveness of a Successful
482 Community-Based Obesity Prevention Program: The Be Active Eat Well Program. *Obesity*. 2013;21(10):2072-80.
- 483 34. Pringle A, Cooke C, Gilson N, Marsh K, McKenna J. Cost-effectiveness of interventions to improve
484 moderate physical activity: A study in nine UK sites. *Health Education Journal*. 2010;69(2):211-24.
- 485 35. Rush E, Obolonkin V, McLennan S, et al. Lifetime cost effectiveness of a through-school nutrition and
486 physical programme: Project Energize. *Obesity Research & Clinical Practice*. 2014;8(2):E115-E22.

- 487 36. Sonnevile KR, Long MW, Ward ZJ, et al. BMI and Healthcare Cost Impact of Eliminating Tax Subsidy for
488 Advertising Unhealthy Food to Youth. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2015;49(1):124-34.
- 489 37. Wang LY, Yang QH, Lowry R, Wechsler H. Economic analysis of a school-based obesity prevention
490 program. *Obesity Research*. 2003;11(11):1313-24.
- 491 38. Wang LY, Nichols LP, Austin SB. The Economic Effect of Planet Health on Preventing Bulimia Nervosa.
492 *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*. 2011;165(8):756-62.
- 493 39. Wright DR, Kenney EL, Giles CM, et al. Modeling the Cost Effectiveness of Child Care Policy Changes in
494 the US. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*. 2015;49(1):135-47.
- 495 40. Hollingworth W, Hawkins J, Lawlor DA, Brown M, Marsh T, Kipping RR. Economic evaluation of
496 lifestyle interventions to treat overweight or obesity in children. *International Journal of Obesity*.
497 2012;36(4):559-66.
- 498 41. Moodie M, Haby M, Wake M, Gold L, Carter R. Cost-effectiveness of a family-based GP-mediated
499 intervention targeting overweight and moderately obese children. *Econ Hum Biol*. 2008;6(3):363-76.
- 500 42. McAuley KA, Taylor RW, Farmer VL, et al. Economic Evaluation of a Community-based Obesity
501 Prevention Program in Children: The A PPLE Project. *Obesity*. 2010;18(1):131-6.
- 502 43. Wang LY, Gutin B, Barbeau P, et al. Cost-effectiveness of a school-based obesity prevention program.
503 *Journal of School Health*. 2008;78(12):619-24.
- 504 44. Peterson M, Chandlee M, Abraham A. Cost-effectiveness analysis of a statewide media campaign to
505 promote adolescent physical activity. *Health promotion practice*. 2008;9(4):426-33.
- 506 45. Hayes A, Lung T, Wen LM, Baur L, Rissel C, Howard K. Economic Evaluation of "Healthy Beginnings" an
507 Early Childhood Intervention to Prevent Obesity. *Obesity*. 2014;22(7):1709-15.
- 508 46. Meng LP, Xu HQ, Liu AL, et al. The Costs and Cost-Effectiveness of a School-Based Comprehensive
509 Intervention Study on Childhood Obesity in China. *Plos One*. 2013;8(10).
- 510 47. Epstein LH, Paluch RA, Wrotniak BH, et al. Cost-Effectiveness of Family-Based Group Treatment for
511 Child and Parental Obesity. *Child*. 2014;10(2):114-21.
- 512 48. Goldfield GS, Epstein LH, Kilanowski CK, Paluch RA, Kogut-Bossler B. Cost-effectiveness of group and
513 mixed family-based treatment for childhood obesity. *International Journal of Obesity*. 2001;25(12):1843-9.
- 514 49. Hollinghurst S, Hunt LP, Banks J, Sharp DJ, Shield JP. Cost and effectiveness of treatment options for
515 childhood obesity. *Pediatric Obesity*. 2014;9(1):E26-E34.
- 516 50. Janicke DM, Sallinen BJ, Perri MG, Lutes LD, Silverstein JH, Brumback B. Comparison of Program Costs
517 for Parent-Only and Family-Based Interventions for Pediatric Obesity in Medically Underserved Rural
518 Settings. *J Rural Health*. 2009;25(3):326-30.
- 519 51. Wake M, Gold L, McCallum Z, Gerner B, Waters E. Economic evaluation of a primary care trial to reduce
520 weight gain in overweight/obese children: The LEAP trial. *Ambulatory Pediatrics*. 2008;8(5):336-41.
- 521 52. Keszytus D, Schreiber A, Wirt T, et al. Economic evaluation of URMEL-ICE, a school-based overweight
522 prevention programme comprising metabolism, exercise and lifestyle intervention in children. *European Journal
523 of Health Economics*. 2013;14(2):185-95.
- 524 53. Krauth C, Liersch S, Sterdt E, Henze V, Robl M, Walter U. [Health economic evaluation of health
525 promotion - the example "fit for pisa"]. *Gesundheitswesen*. 2013;75(11):742-6.
- 526 54. Martinez PM, Lopez MS, Bastida JL, et al. Cost-effectiveness of an intervention to reduce overweight and
527 obesity in 9-10-year-olds. The Cuenca study. *Gaceta Sanitaria*. 2011;25(3):198-204.
- 528 55. Kalavainen M, Karjalainen S, Martikainen J, Korppi M, Linnosmaa I, Nuutinen O. Cost-effectiveness of
529 routine and group programs for treatment of obese children. *Pediatrics International*. 2009;51(5):606-11.

- 530 56. PHARMAC tPMA. Prescription for Pharmacoeconomic Analysis: Methods for Cost-utility Analysis
531 (version 2.2). New Zealand.2015.
- 532 57. Committee PBA. Guidelines for preparing submissions to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory
533 Committee (version 4.3). Canberra: Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing. 2008.
- 534 58. NICE. Methods for the Development of NICE Public Health Guidance. London: National Institute for
535 Health and Care Excellence; 2012.
- 536 59. members AFEC. The AMCP Format for Formulary Submissions (version 4.0). The USA.; 2016.
- 537 60. Anderson R. Systematic reviews of economic evaluations: utility or futility? *Health Econ.* 2010;19(3):350-64.
- 538 61. Frew E. Aligning Health Economics Methods to Fit with the Changing World of Public Health. *Applied*
539 *Health Economics and Health Policy.* 2017;15(3):287-9.
- 540 62. Treasury H. The green book, appraisal and evaluation in central government treasury guidance london:
541 TSO. 2011.
- 542 63. Musgrove P, Fox-Rushby J. Cost-effectiveness analysis for priority setting. *Disease control priorities in*
543 *developing countries.* 2006;2.
- 544 64. NICE. Guide to the methods of technology appraisal 2013. London: National Institute for Health and
545 Clinical Excellence; 2013.

546



© 2018 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

547