

# EPODE European Network (2008-2011): Preventing Childhood Obesity

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## Childhood obesity prevention: An urgent public health issue

The prevalence of overweight and obesity worldwide has increased significantly over the past twenty years. Overweight and obesity are now the principal risk factors for disabling and life-threatening health conditions in young people. The need for concrete and effective programmes aimed at prevention is now urgent. The EPODE methodology is considered to be an innovative example of a community project aimed at promoting healthy behaviours in children.

## EPODE, an innovative multi-stakeholders approach

The EPODE programme, initiated in 2004 in ten French pilot towns, is a coordinated, capacity-building approach for communities to implement effective and sustainable strategies to prevent childhood obesity.

By adopting EPODE methodology, and by being strongly supportive of children enjoying healthy eating, active play and recreation, it is considered that local environments, childhood settings and family norms can all play a part in reducing obesity levels.

The aim of EPODE is to create the political commitment, resources, support services and evidence base to empower community stakeholders and to facilitate involvement of the community for the community at the very heart of the "ecological niche" – the town. EPODE is a behaviour-centred approach that integrates a positive, concrete and step-by-step learning process to food and physical activity.

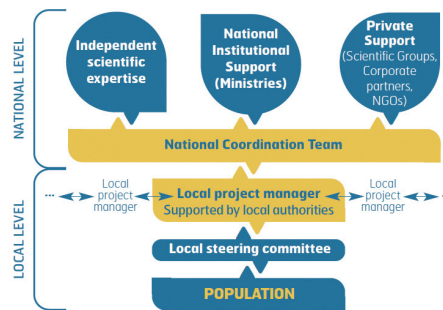
## EPODE programmes in Europe to date

To date, 226 towns in France (EPODE), 16 towns in Belgium (VIASANO), 38 towns in Spain (THAO) and 13 towns in Greece (PAIDEIATROFI) are implementing the EPODE methodology. Success is measured by a large and strong field mobilization and by an encouraging improvement in the prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity in the French pilot towns.



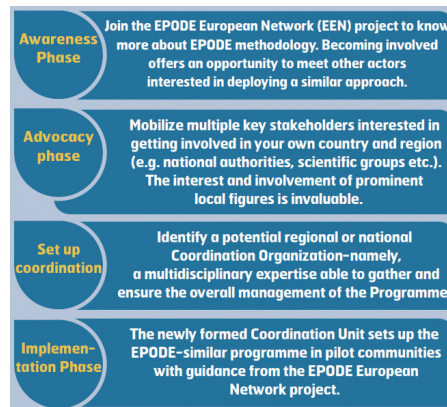
## Organization of an EPODE programme

A local project manager is nominated by the local authorities of each EPODE town and is trained at national level by an EPODE coordination team. Each project manager is given tools to mobilize local stakeholders by a local steering committee and local networks. This methodology empowers the local community and contributes to creating a healthy environment that facilitates changes in social norms and healthier behaviours (see figure below).



## 4 critical steps in setting up an EPODE-similar programme in your country

The objective, with the support of the European Commission, is to accelerate implementation of further EPODE-similar initiatives across Europe. To progress, support from key stakeholders is needed at all levels. Described below is a four-step approach to facilitate the EPODE deployment process.



## The EPODE European Network: a project supported by DG SANCO to enrich and disseminate EPODE methodology throughout Europe

The EPODE European Network (EEN) - European project running from 2008 to 2011 with the support of the European Commission (DG Health

and Consumers)<sup>1</sup> and private partners<sup>2</sup> – therefore provides a valuable opportunity and an efficient resource for any stakeholder willing to become involved in obesity prevention in a country.

Through various series of meetings and events built around the four "pillars" of the EPODE methodology, four major European universities<sup>3</sup> are conducting applied research aimed at enriching EPODE methodology and deliver concrete guidelines that could be transferred to countries willing to deploy an EPODE-similar programme.

Attendance and contribution to these meetings and events are therefore very welcome. For more information, please contact the EEN Coordinating Team:

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For more information on the EPODE programmes



[www.epode.fr](http://www.epode.fr)



[www.thaoweb.com](http://www.thaoweb.com)



[www.viasano.be](http://www.viasano.be)



[www.paideiatrofi.org](http://www.paideiatrofi.org)



[www.epode-european-network.com](http://www.epode-european-network.com)

1. Grant: Directorate General for Health and Consumers (European Commission)

2. EEN private partners: Ferrero, Mars, Nestlé, Orangina-Schweppes

3. EEN associated partners: Free University of Amsterdam (The Netherlands), Gent University (Belgium), Lille 2 University (France), Zaragoza University (Spain), Proteines (France), Fleurbaix Laventie Ville Santé NGO (France)