



EARLY LIFE AND ADOLESCENCE PROGRAMME STRATEGY

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Vision

To improve the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families through undertaking and promoting public health research of the highest quality, in a variety of settings, seeking to translate findings into policy and practice wherever possible.

Objectives

We will achieve this by drawing together and supporting those researchers with interests in the health of children and young people and the public health measures which might be taken to sustain or improve health and wellbeing to work together and in partnership with public health policy makers and practitioners.

In coming together we hope to achieve a range of secondary objectives:

- To share knowledge and findings from existing projects
- To discuss and develop collaboration with potential to lead to new research studies
- To foster career development for early career researchers and post graduate researchers
- To identify the translational possibilities of our work and to work with other programmes across Fuse to realise these possibilities wherever possible.

ELAP covers a range of issues stemming from public health concerns that are researched within three key phases in early life and adolescence, namely Pre-conception, pregnancy and post-natal life, Childhood and Adolescence. The programme takes a cross-cutting approach and will develop synergies between our programme and the other five Fuse research programmes, particularly behaviour change and complex systems programmes.

- **Pre-conception, pregnancy and post-natal life stage** has been recognised as critical for maternal and child health wellbeing. Research within ELAP seeks to develop a broad grasp of public health concerns affecting this stage of life looking at issues such as smoking in pregnancy, teenage pregnancy, breastfeeding, parental mental health, obesity, nutrition and inequalities, such as defining what a preconception population is, and different interventions required for different target populations (e.g. teenagers versus adults, those not planning pregnancy)

versus those actively preparing for pregnancy). We will build on previous research that has been delivered within Fuse over the last 11 years, including babyClear, FeedFinder, PROMOTE, MapMe and many more, to addressing knowledge gaps and support implementation and scaling up of developed interventions. In addition, research members evaluate public health interventions that have been designed to address concerns affecting health at this stage of life. Further research highlights socio-economic circumstances that impact upon health and wellbeing in pre- and post- pregnancy, among which are issues of food security related to access to nutrition and cost, provision of vitamin supplements and effects of marginalisation on health. Research recognises aspects of health economics that affect the decisions when planning interventions, such as the cost of interventions and who bears its burden. It also recognises that, while pre-conception stage is considered an ideal stage to target public health interventions to improve maternal and child health, there are recognised challenges with targeting public health interventions to preconception populations, such as defining what a preconception population is, and different interventions required for different target populations (e.g. teenagers versus adults, those not planning pregnancy versus those actively preparing for pregnancy).

- **Childhood** looks at concern related to child health in nursery, preschool and early school years with a view of monitoring and promoting change in debilitating health behaviours. Fuse ELAP is well positioned to lead research into and influence policy and practice in this regard. ELAP members are involved in a wide range of research. Obesity prevention in early life is one of the key themes researched within the programme, which takes into consideration factors such as understanding and provision of nutrition, social and technological developments that abet sedentary behaviours, and measures of physical activity and fitness in childhood. Mental wellbeing in childhood and understanding and promotion of healthy sleep behaviours are key other themes researched in relation to childhood health. These programmes take into account the impact of social media and cultural beliefs on parental and children's behaviours in relation to sleep behaviours and mental health. Social and health inequality sits across the stage as a key determinant affecting access and availability to health behaviours in childhood.
- **Adolescence** is seen as a critical stage when risk factors for health can rise sharply, and is thus regarded as a period when interventions should aim to promote resilience and reduce risk taking behaviours. It is also recognised that the later years of adolescence are particularly important as a child transitions to adulthood, but there is a dearth of research in this period. ELAP members' research on adolescent health contributes to understanding broad issues affecting this age such as consumption of drugs and alcohol, self-harm and teenage pregnancy. They also have highlighted the need to engage multiple supporting structures, among which the roles of parents and schools figure prominently. The research points out

that early involvement with parents and schools needs to be restorative and that mechanisms need to be established to transmit a clear public health message to these supportive structures.

Meetings

ELAP will convene regular quarterly meetings, timed to follow on from other Fuse meetings wherever possible. This group will contain representation from practice partners who hold early years and adolescence health briefs from across the North East Region. These individuals have participated in early meetings and discussion on strategy.

Meetings will rotate around the region.

Deliverables

1. We will invite ELAP members to send Fuse a list of all their relevant existing work, and plan to update this on an annual basis.
2. We will continue to maintain a list of policy and practice partners with specific interests in pregnancy, child and adolescent health prepared to take an active role in our work
3. We will work together along with policy and practice partners to identify existing key strengths but also potential opportunities for new collaborations. Our work will follow the [Fuse Knowledge Exchange model](#), applying four steps to support the use of research evidence in policy and practice: i) awareness raising, ii) sharing knowledge; iii) making evidence fit for purpose (localising and tailoring); and iv) supporting uptake and implementation. Deliverable 10 below relates directly to step 2.
4. We will keep our Fuse webpages up to date and informative, linking them to websites in our home institutions
5. We will maintain a dedicated email list of the ELAP network to enable communication between members of this programme
6. We will contribute to Fuse Quarterly Research Meetings by showcasing our work when required
7. We will encourage researchers completing relevant projects to disseminate their work through the Fuse Blog, FuseBriefings and Fuse website/ social media
8. We will highlight ELAP projects which have been initiated through AskFuse, and showcase these on the Fuse website.
9. We will encourage all researchers at all stages of their career to plan for impact and translation within their projects, for example by promoting the SPHR six knowledge sharing principles in all our research projects

10. We will encourage ELAP members to look at synergies and potential collaborations through a series of events designed around 'problems needing solutions' and 'finding a friend/collaborator' in this field
11. We will work in collaboration with the SPHR Children Young People and Families programme and ensure that Fuse has good representation within the SPHR programmes of work