

# The health and wellbeing of the Irish population

*Nutrition, public health, food marketing, consumer behaviour, obstetrics and endocrinology...*

The HRB Centre for Health and Diet Research provides a national focal point for public health nutrition research in the Republic of Ireland. The centre was established in 2008 with funding support from the Irish Health Research Board (HRB) and the Irish Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. In a recent international peer review exercise the centre was described as 'flourishing' and the panel considered 'the unique mix of people, backgrounds and skills to be a real strength and perhaps unique in Europe'. The centre, which is led by Professor Ivan Perry, Department of Epidemiology & Public Health, University College Cork (UCC), is based on inter-institutional collaboration between University College Cork (UCC), University College Dublin (UCD), the Institute of Public Health in Ireland, the University of Ulster and Teagasc Food Research Centre. The centre draws on expertise from a wide range of academic disciplines across these institutions, including nutrition, public health, food marketing, consumer behaviour, obstetrics and endocrinology. It has developed formal links with national agencies and stakeholders working in food and health, including safefood Ireland, the Irish Health Service Executive and the Department of Health. The centre also works with international partners including the Centre of Excellence for Public Health (NI), Queens University Belfast, Centre of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Leeds Institute of Genetics, Health and Therapeutics and the Centre for Diet and Activity Research (CEDAR), at the Institute of Public Health, University of Cambridge.

The mission of the centre is to develop a sustainable national inter-institutional and interagency

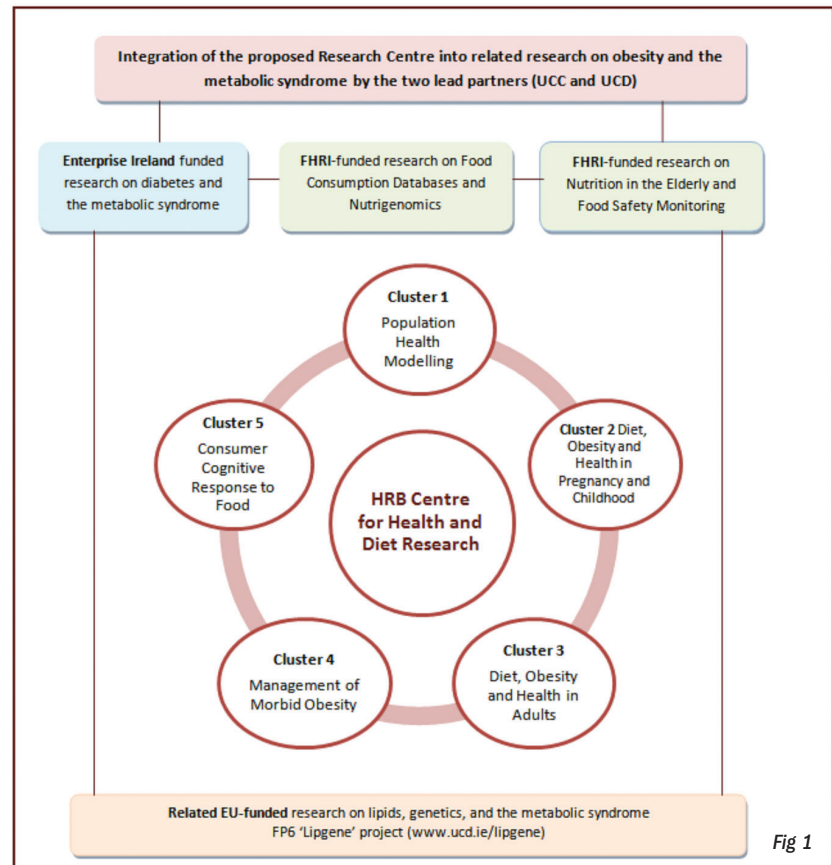


Fig 1

consortium, focused on promoting the health and wellbeing of the Irish population by producing and effectively disseminating high quality evidence to guide practice and policy in the area of public health nutrition. The work of the centre is focused on strengthening the evidence base for the prevention and management of obesity, diabetes and related metabolic disorders, and increasing our understanding of the determinants and modifiers of food choice and other food related behaviours. The centre is committed to working with Enterprise Ireland and other relevant agencies and partners to develop technologies to support healthy choices and the maintenance/achievement of healthy weight in children and adults, and to strengthening Ireland's

capacity in public health nutrition through internationally competitive, inter-institutional Master's and doctoral level training.

**'The centre draws on expertise from a wide range of academic disciplines...'**

The specific objectives of the centre are addressed in five discrete but interlinked research clusters spanning population-based, clinical, translational and policy relevant research projects, using quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and within the framework of research designs employed in health and social sciences, including market/consumer behaviour research.

**Cluster 1: Population Health Modelling (Professor Kevin Balanda, Institute of Public Health in Ireland, Professor Ivan Perry, UCC)** – the primary objectives for this research cluster are to provide a critical research base for the establishment of an Obesity Observatory for Ireland. Drawing on the existing Irish public health nutrition infrastructure and data resources and on new data and outputs from the centre, we are also working on statistical ‘Population Prevalence Models’ for diabetes and other nutrition related chronic conditions and on a National Burden of Disease (NBD) study in Ireland, focused on obesity and nutrition related risk factors.

**Cluster 2: Diet, obesity and health in pregnancy and childhood (Professor Cecily Kelleher, UCD, and Professor Fionnuala McAuliffe, UCD and National Maternity Hospital)** – the focus of work in this cluster is on the effects of maternal diet during pregnancy on foetal growth and risk of obesity in childhood. The work programme includes a series of analyses of the data from an existing inter-generational antenatal cohort study (Lifeways Cohort Study); and a large randomised controlled trial of the impact of a low glycaemic diet

intervention on the prevention of recurrence of macrosomia in pregnancy.

**Cluster 3: Diet, obesity and health in adults (Professor Ivan Perry and Dr Catherine Phillips, UCC)** – this research programme is focused on the estimation of the effects of specific dietary exposures and dietary patterns on prevalence, incidence and population trends in obesity, the metabolic syndrome, Type 2 diabetes and major CVD endpoints in linked cross-sectional and longitudinal studies involving representative samples of middle-aged men and women.

‘It has developed formal links with national agencies and stakeholders working in food and health, including safefood Ireland, the Irish Health Service Executive and the Department of Health.’

**Cluster 4: Management of Morbid Obesity (Dr Donal O’Shea, UCD)** – we have established a national obesity cohort based on a database of the severely obese adult and paediatric



Professor Ivan Perry, Head

patients referred to all specialist hospital centres for obesity in Ireland. This database is providing a platform for quality assurance in the management of morbid obesity in the Republic of Ireland and it supports recruitment of patients into randomised clinical trials.

**Cluster 5: Consumer cognitive response to food (Dr Mary McCarthy, UCC, and Professor Patrick Wall, UCD)** – the focus of this research programme is on consumer cognitive response to food, including the socio-demographic, psychological, physiological and health status factors that drive consumer food choice.

The work of the HRB Centre for Health and Diet Research forms part of a larger national and European framework in food and health research (see Fig. 1).



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