

# Exploring Potential Consequences of Obesity Prevention on Psychological Health

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## Introduction



Rates of overweight and obesity have nearly doubled in recent decades. Although many researchers and policymakers acknowledge that obesity is a complex condition, driven by a multitude of societal factors, the **physiological processes and behavioural choices** of individuals continue to be the primary focus of prevention initiatives.



Through the use of potentially **stigmatizing messages** that place responsibility on individuals to manage body weight, there is potential for obesity prevention policies to elicit societal weight bias. This may lead to **unanticipated consequences**, including internalized weight bias, experienced weight stigma, and related behaviours, which may increase risk of weight gain and poorer overall psychological health.

## Purpose

To examine experiences of weight bias and stigma and psychological health among young Canadian adults in relation to population-level obesity prevention strategies

We will investigate:

1. prevalences of internalized weight bias and experienced weight stigma at baseline and over time;
2. associations between internalized weight bias and experienced stigma and indicators of psychological well-being at baseline and over time; and
3. the influence of weight-related policies on bias and stigma, taking advantage of contrasting policies among jurisdictions.

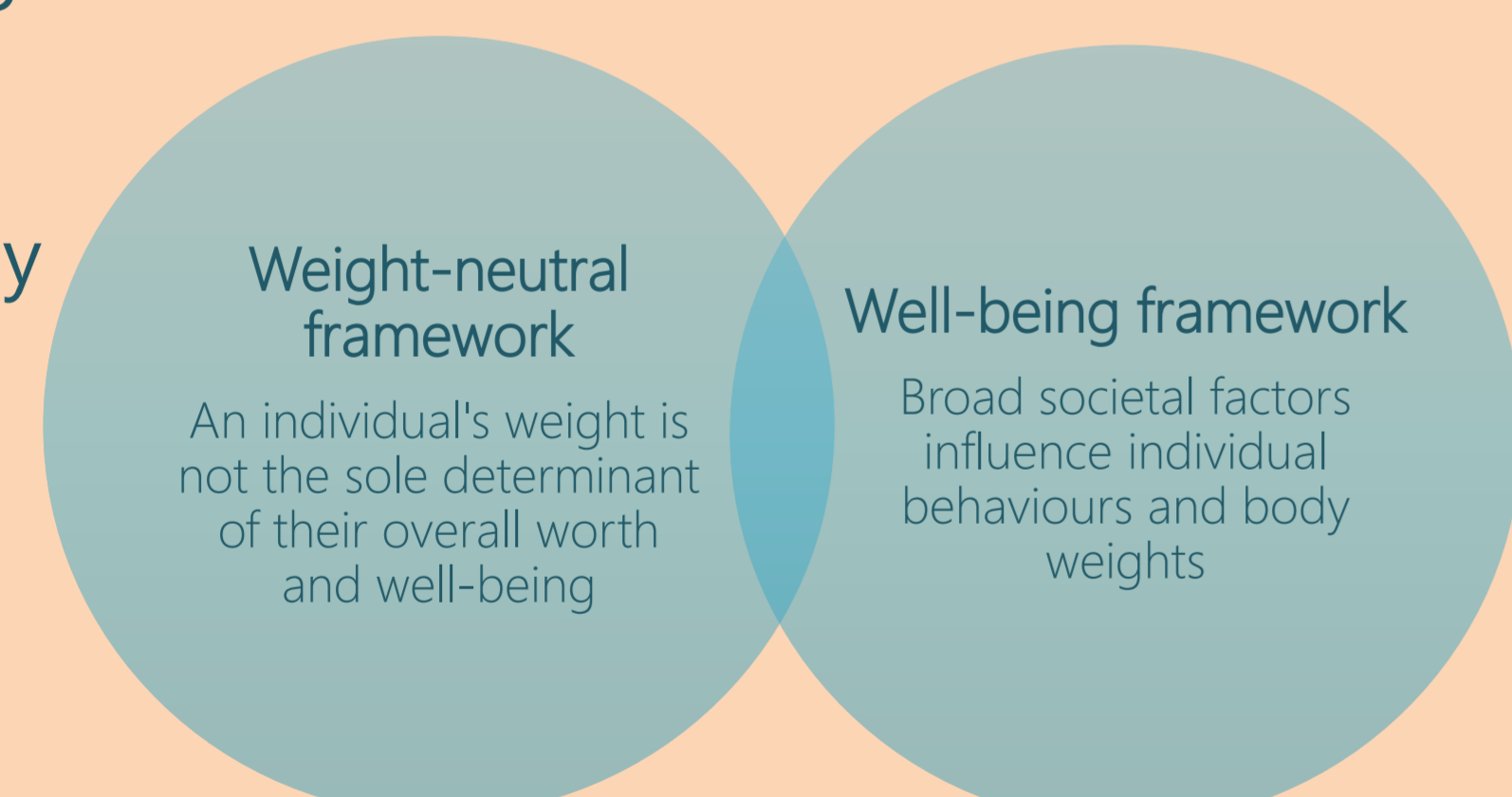


## Methods

### Theoretical Approach

Traditional views of obesity have been dominated by the theme of “healthy weights”, which typically places the onus for weight management on individuals.

Alternatively, this study is guided by two different, yet overlapping, theoretical approaches.



### Sample

10,000 young adults (ages 16-30)

5 Canadian cities (Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax)



### Data Collection

**Participant data**, collected via online survey, include measures of:

- perceived body size and weight;
- weight goal and ideal weight;
- weight-related behaviours, including weight loss intentions, methods, and body image and attitudes;
- weight bias and experienced stigma;
- stress, depression, and anxiety; and
- demographic characteristics.

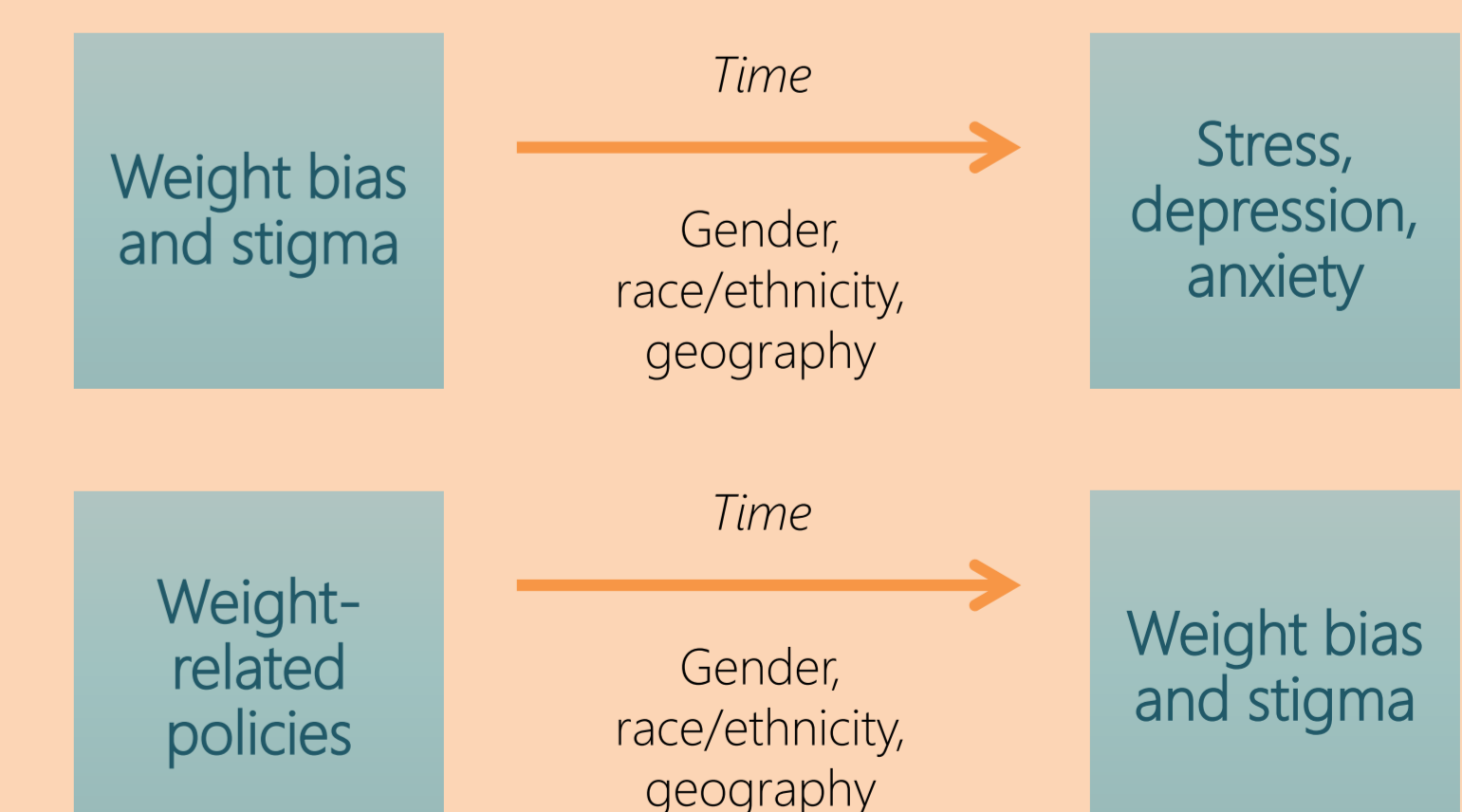
**Policy data** will be derived from existing and on-going scans of municipal-, provincial- and federal-level policies that promote change in weight-related factors, such as diet and physical activity.

### Analyses

Generate estimates for baseline and subsequent years of data to examine **trends** in experienced weight stigma and bias and related variables.



Multilevel longitudinal regression analyses to assess:



## Implications



**No known study has investigated the potential impact of weight-related policies** on overall psychological health and wellness, experienced weight stigma, and weight-related behaviours among young adults, including those affected by overweight/obesity and ‘normal’ weight.



This study will inform future health policy through the use of a **systems lens to investigate potential consequences** of a weight-centred landscape on these constructs. By understanding the psychological and health-related implications of obesity prevention initiatives, we may be able to guide future policies and avoid doing more harm than good.

## Acknowledgements

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