REDUCING INEQUALITIES IN THE EARLY YEARS
A RAPID EVIDENCE REVIEW TO INFORM LEAP'S NEXT FIVE YEARS

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STARTING POLL: ENGAGEMENT WITH THE REVIEW

Have you seen or read the evidence review?

➢ Yes, I've read the whole thing

➢ Yes, I've skimmed it

➢ No, I'm hoping this session will tell me everything I need to know!

➢ What evidence review?

AIMS OF THE RAPID EVIDENCE REVIEW

Summarise the evidence to inform the LEAP's Theory of Change, System Mapping and Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Framework

Challenges and strengths of a place-based approach to bring about transformational, sustainable and long-term improvements

What influences child outcomes in the early years and what works to support children's early development

RAPID REVIEW METHODOLOGY

Identified 1000 relevant data sources from 2010-19

31 data sources selected for relevance and robustness

Selected data sources summarised and supplemented with additional references

LEAP: a **place-based initiative** which aims to transform early years services and reduce inequalities in early child development through a collaboration of all stakeholders

THE DEFINING FEATURES OF A PLACE-BASED APPROACH

Focus on predictors of inequalities

Evidence based

Collective approach to address complex problems in a small area

Shared vision, reach & resources

Community engagement

DO PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES WORK?

- PBIs are growing in popularity as increasingly evident that even the most effective programmes are not sufficient to achieve improved sustainable outcomes at socially significant scale

- Some well-known PBIs have generated considerable interest as they have successfully targeted the social determinants of inequalities eg in health and education
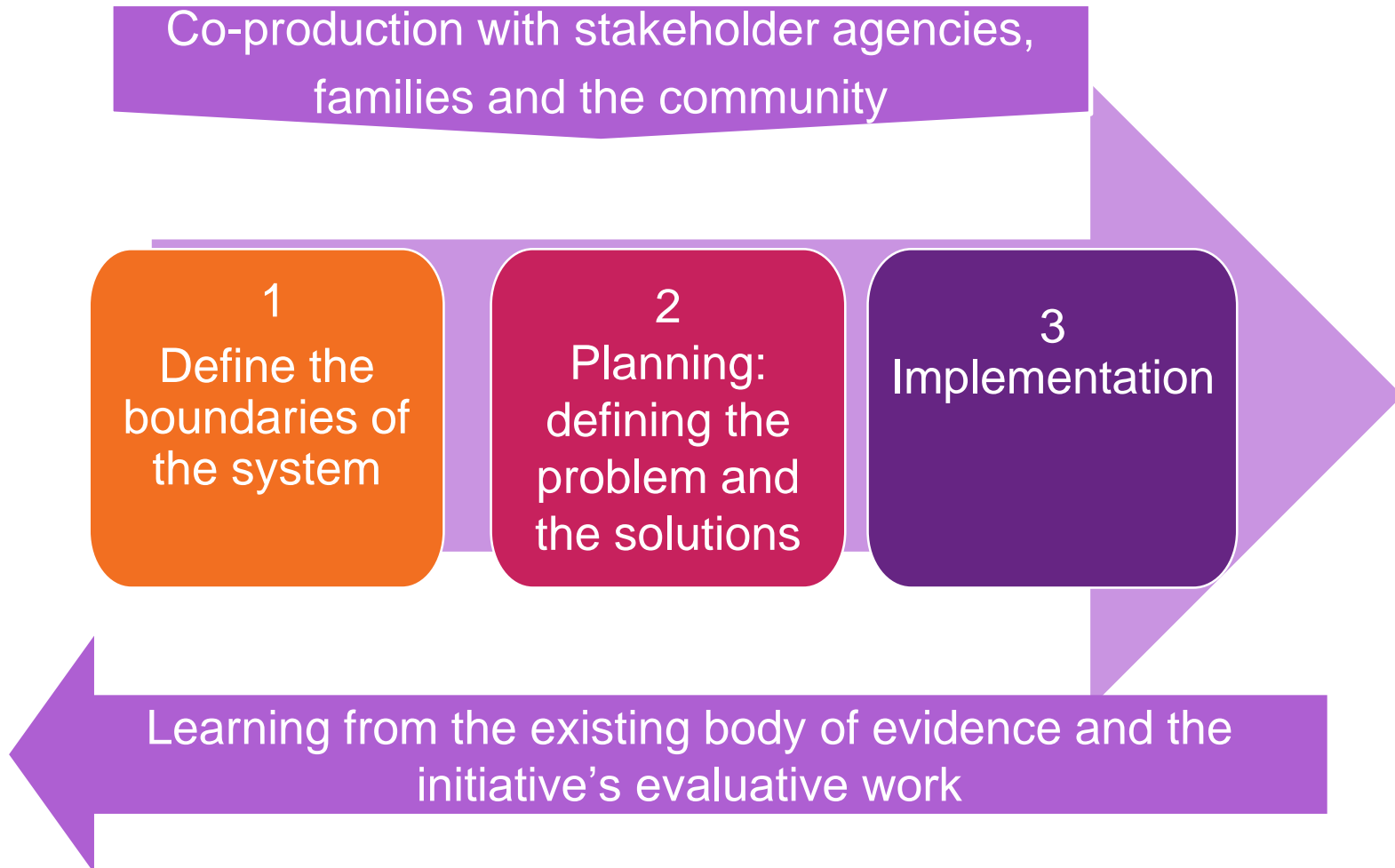
  BUT

- The quality of PBI evaluations vary and the findings are mixed

- Difficulties in evaluating PBIs reflect their complexity and the inadequacy of traditional evaluation designs

A PLACE-BASED APPROACH REQUIRES SYSTEMS CHANGE

"… systems change… requires exceptional attention to the detailed and often mundane work of **noticing and acting on much that is implicit and invisible to many** … Making big bets to tackle a social problem without first immersing yourself in understanding **what is holding the problem** in place is a recipe for failure. On the other hand, bringing attention to **shifting the power dynamics** at play, identifying where people are **connected or disconnected** from others who must be part of the solution, exposing the **mental models** that inhibit success in policy change, and investigating the ways in which the foundation's **internal conditions help or hinder external aspirations**—this is the nature of successfully changing systems." (Kania et al 2018)

HOW DO SYSTEMS CHANGE AND HOW DO WE KNOW IT?

Co-production with stakeholder agencies, families and the community

1 Define the boundaries of the system

2 Planning: defining the problem and the solutions

3 Implementation

Learning from the existing body of evidence and the initiative's evaluative work

DEFINE THE BOUNDARIES OF THE SYSTEM

Where boundaries get drawn is potentially very significant and requires frank conversations

PBIs define systems in pragmatic ways – rather than attempting to deal with everything that needs to change, focus on what can be realistically changed

Defining the LEAP boundaries:

- Do boundaries reflect the wider system within which a child exists?

- Who has/hasn't been involved in defining the boundaries?

- How has evidence informed decisions about boundaries?

- How are boundaries communicated eg through partnerships, provision, what is measured?

- Are there mechanisms for reviewing boundaries?

Planning systems change

- **Understanding the problem**

- **Identifying solutions**

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

"The act **of defining a problem is potentially the most transformative step** in a change effort …. clarifying the targeted problem by understanding its **root causes** and determining who and what constitutes the "system." Engaging diverse stakeholders in this exploration is an essential part of systems change; through such engagement targeted problems become clarified and potentially renamed as stakeholders learn from each others' perspectives. Importantly, drawing boundaries around **who to include/exclude in this analysis connotes value to stakeholder roles and determines which perspectives dominate and which ones are silenced**."

(Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2012)

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM – KEY QS FOR LEAP

Population and **individual** assessment of needs:

- What evidence has informed the population needs assessment?

- What 'story' is the assessment telling about early intervention and the predictors of inequalities in early childhood in the LEAP areas?

- Is the assessment 'owned' by families and the community?

- Is the assessment 'owned' and used by stakeholder agencies?

- Do stakeholder agencies use shared approaches and tools to identify families who need targeted support?

- Are there mechanisms for regularly reviewing population needs and how individual assessments are carried out?

FINDING SOLUTIONS – KEY QS FOR LEAP

Decisions about programmes and services **across the system**:

- Is there a growing investment in early years evidence-based intervention?

- Is there evidence of pooled/aligned budgets to fund evidence-based intervention?

- How are early years programmes selected by LEAP and stakeholder agencies?

- What are plans for evaluating programmes delivered by LEAP and stakeholder agencies?

- Who is involved in shaping and informing the evaluative work?

IMPLEMENTATION – KEY QS FOR LEAP

- A shared outcomes framework owned by all stakeholder agencies?

- Families see the framework as a good way to assess if services are meeting their needs and engaging them in co-production?

- Mechanisms for regularly reviewing the framework?

- Systems for sharing information about families and operational data?

- A shared strength-based model of working with families?

- Integrating ways of working of different stakeholder agencies?

- How are evaluation findings used across the system?

- How is the community involved in service provision?

POLL: HOW DO SYSTEMS CHANGE AND HOW DO WE KNOW IT?

Of the features of systems change discussed, which in your experience is the **most important** to understand if the early years system is improving?

➢Shared understanding of needs of the local population

➢How funding is invested across the system

➢How evidence is used to make decisions across the system

➢How families are involved in shaping programmes and services

Q&A

- **Our question to you**: are there features of an early years system that we haven't mentioned but that in your experience are important to understand if the system is improving?

- **Your questions and comments** on our findings on the challenges and strengths of a place-based approach to bring about transformational, sustainable and long-term improvements