

South East Regional Network
Association of Directors of Public Health



Making the Economic Case for Prevention

A toolkit for public health practitioners

A Quick Guide

A South East ADPH Network guide
produced in collaboration with the South East
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Disparities.



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Quick guide to:

Making the economic case for prevention: a toolkit for public health practitioners

This document is a guide, aimed at public health professionals who wish to make a strong economic case for prevention. It is a quick guide giving six simple steps and general principles to follow for making the case. For more in-depth analysis and a full toolkit please refer to the main report (including section 1.3).

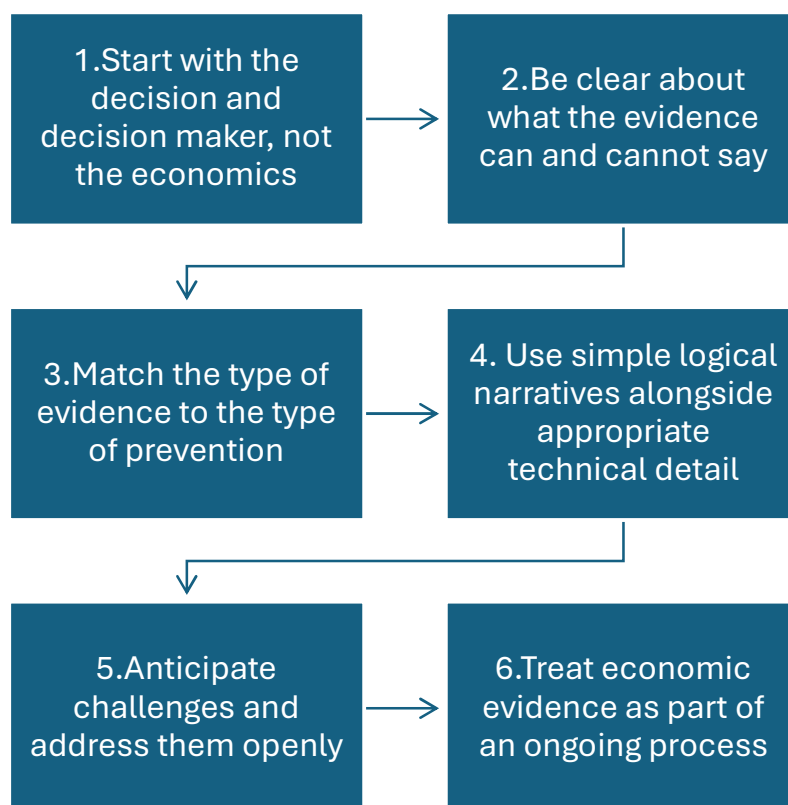


Figure 1 - Six steps to making a strong economic case for prevention

Six steps to making a strong economic case for prevention

Economic evidence can be a useful aid in securing and sustaining support for disease prevention, especially within environments of financial pressure and competing priorities. Its role is not to “prove” prevention always saves money, but to help decision-makers understand value, risk, affordability, and trade-offs in a structured and defensible way.

1. Start with the decision and decision maker, not the economics

Before seeking or presenting economic evidence, be clear about the **decision context**:

- **What decision is being made** (e.g. invest, sustain, scale, redesign, or disinvest)
- **Who the decision-maker is** (e.g. council finance lead / cabinet member, ICB partner, finance professional)
- **What their main concerns / criteria are** (deliverability, affordability, efficiency, financial control, risk management, long-term sustainability, fairness / equity, visibility, stewardship of place / system, impact on existing services and workflow etc)
- **How existing guidance for decision-makers can inform approach**

Different contexts place emphasis on different concerns / criteria. Framing can be adapted to support the particular needs of stakeholders.

2. Be clear about what the evidence can and cannot say

Economic evidence can be used to help decision-makers understand:

- The **scale of preventable harm and cost** (why action matters)
- The **types of value created, noting that absence of early cash-flow reduction does not necessarily mean an absence of value**. Many prevention interventions deliver value by slowing future cost growth, reducing risk, and avoiding predictable harm, rather than releasing cash immediately.
- **How the proposal affects short-term budgets / affordability and financial risk both short and long term**
- **How benefits and costs are distributed** across populations and organisations and in what time courses

3. Match the type of evidence to the type of prevention

- **Economic evidence available will vary with stage of prevention** (e.g. wider determinants, primary, secondary)
- **Support decision-makers to consider evidence appropriate to the stage of prevention**
- **Combine multiple forms of evidence** rather than relying on a single metric

4. Use simple logical narratives alongside appropriate technical detail

Well-designed proposals may use:

- **Plain-English logic models** (where these are possible) showing how investment leads to outcomes, although they may be less useful where complexity exists. Theories of change are also important.
- **A small number of relevant metrics**, clearly explained
- **Local data and examples**, where possible
- **Open discussion of uncertainty and assumptions, and risks of action and inaction**

5. Anticipate challenges and address them openly

- **Effective use of economic evidence includes responding to likely concerns** including about affordability, time to realise benefits, where the benefits are realised
- **Anticipating such challenges and thinking about possible responses can support making the case confidently and in a balanced way**

6. Treat economic evidence as part of an ongoing process

- Consistent **local monitoring** can help demonstrate direction of travel, support learning, and reduce uncertainty for subsequent decisions.
- **Local generation of evidence** can have an important role, strengthening future investment cases and increasing investors' confidence over time.