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## Early career investigators and precision public health

The priority schema for strategies that will be most consequential for improving the public's health is in hot debate.<sup>1-3</sup> Vocal skeptics of precision public health caution against precision based approaches, suggesting that focusing on these advances is not worth the effort and could overshadow the true mission of public health. Indeed, some leaders are putting substantial energy into advancing a negative narrative on this topic. The nihilistic tone of these critiques is concerning for the field as a whole, but particularly for early career investigators, like us, who are engaged in precision-based research. We, an international group of early career investigators, are caught in the eye of this storm, as we hear that our research programmes to integrate precision with public health applications are a potentially misguided journey—a daunting proposition for new investigators.

Despite the growing debate, we choose to pursue the challenge of how to balance and harmonise precision and population health. We recognise the importance of discourse about the direction of public health; however, we believe pitting precision and population against each other only diminishes opportunities for incoming generations of scholars to meaningfully contribute novel, high-impact research and interventions to improve population health. We feel uniquely positioned to tackle challenging questions at the forefront of the debate and bring to life a field in which both precision and population approaches are complementary, and dare we dream, synergistic?

To leaders who worry that public health will become solely a precision enterprise—we hear you. However, we believe opportunities are abundant to embrace the complexity of health and foster collaboration. Achieving this vision is possible by emphasising the

mutually reinforcing aspects of precision and population health—or precision public health—a term that inherently acknowledges the two concepts together, rather than in opposition.

We continue to be inspired by the words of Geoffrey Rose, who transformed the field of epidemiology in suggesting that there is a need for both precision and population health strategies when the priority is to improve health. In fact, Rose reminds us that, “fortunately competition between them is usually unnecessary.”<sup>4</sup> We agree. As early career investigators, we will continue to examine questions that call for both approaches, and we offer our passion to leaders of public health and precision medicine to help to move this transdisciplinary field forward.

1 Chowkwanyun M, Bayer R, Galea S. “Precision” public health - between novelty and hype. *N Engl J Med* 2018; **379**: 1398–400.

2 Khoury MJ, Galea S. Will precision medicine improve population health? *Jama* 2016; **316**: 1357–58.

3 Taylor-Robinson D, Kee F. Precision public health—the emperor’s new clothes. *Int J Epidemiol* 2018; **48**: 1–6.

4 Rose G. Sick individuals and sick populations. *Int J Epidemiol.* 1985; **14**: 32–38