

**Program in Policy Decision-Making**

**McMaster University**

**26 October 2012**



# **Harnessing Research Evidence to Make Change Happen**

First Biennial Australian Implementation Conference  
Melbourne, VIC, Australia

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**State of research and state of policymaking**

**Many types of research evidence are needed**

**Addressing challenges in using research evidence**

**Wrap up and resources**



**Supporting the use of research evidence (what this conference is calling ‘implementation’) looks very different depending on who you’re supporting**

- Citizens (patients, parents, etc.)
- Practitioners (doctors, social workers, etc.)
- Managers (in hospitals, NGOs, etc.)
- Policymakers (in government)\*

**It also looks very different depending on what you’re supporting them to do**

- Select which programs and services to provide / fund
- Strengthen systems (to get cost-effective programs and services to those who need them)\*



**Three (soon four) systematic reviews have examined the factors that increase the prospects for evidence use**

- Interactions between researchers and policymakers
  - Engage policymakers in priority-setting, research (including reviews), and deliberative dialogues
- Timing / timeliness
  - Facilitate retrieval of research evidence through one-stop shops, SUPPORT tools, training workshops, and rapid-response units

**One systematic review has examined the effectiveness of interventions to support review use by policymakers<sup>4</sup>**



## **Many factors influence the policymaking process**

- Institutional constraints (e.g., constitutional rules)
- Interest group pressure
- Ideas (e.g., citizens' values and many types of information, including tacit knowledge and real-world views and experiences)
- External events (e.g., global recession)

**Research evidence is just one of these factors (and it can be used in instrumental, conceptual and political / symbolic ways)**

# State of Policymaking (2)



## **Does the policymaking process in Australia provide the same 'ways in' for research evidence as the process in other countries?**

- Direct routes to politicians, policy advisors and civil servants in central and line agencies
  - Election (and leadership) platforms
  - Budget setting
  - Policy development
- Indirect routes
  - Stakeholder advocacy
  - Media coverage
  - International agreements / global guidance

# State of Policymaking (3)



**What does evidence-informed policymaking mean?**

# Many Types of Research Evidence Are Needed



## Defining the problem

- (Lots of institutional/state data)
- Making comparisons (over time, across settings or against plans)
  - (Reviews of) Observational studies, such as administrative database studies and community surveys
- Highlighting alternative framings of the problem to assist with mobilizing support among different groups
  - (Reviews of) Qualitative studies that examine stakeholders' views about and experiences with the problem



# Many Types of Research Evidence Are Needed (2)



## Assessing potential policy & program options

- Identifying several feasible policy and program options that could affect the problem
  - Frameworks (alone or embedded in reviews and overviews of reviews)
- Describing the positive effects (benefits) of the options
  - (Reviews of) Effectiveness studies (e.g., randomized controlled trials, interrupted time series, CBAs)
- Describing the negative effects (harms) of the options
  - (Reviews of) Effectiveness or observational studies

# Many Types of Research Evidence Are Needed (3)



## Assessing potential policy and program options (2)

- Describing the cost-effectiveness of options
  - (Reviews of) Economic evaluations
- Describing the key elements of complex options (to facilitate local adaptation if necessary)
  - (Reviews of) Qualitative studies that examine how or why interventions work (i.e., process evaluations)
- Describing stakeholders' views about and experiences with the options
  - (Reviews of) Qualitative studies that examine stakeholders' views about and experiences with particular options

# Many Types of Research Evidence Are Needed (4)



## Identifying implementation considerations

- Identifying potential barriers (and facilitators) to implementation at the level of citizens, practitioner, organizations and systems
  - (Reviews of) Observational studies and/or qualitative studies
- Describing the effects of appropriately targeted implementation strategies
  - (Reviews of) Effectiveness studies

## Monitoring implementation and evaluating impact

# Many Types of Research Evidence Are Needed (5)



## **Evidence briefs**

- Documents that incorporate all of these types of research evidence in a given country/state

## **Evidence-informed policymaking**

- A process by which those involved in or likely to be significantly affected by a policy have the opportunity to deliberate about the problem, options and implementation considerations, informed by all of these types of research evidence and by insights about all of the other factors that influence policymaking

# Addressing Challenges in Using Research Evidence



- 1. Research evidence competes with many other factors in the policymaking process**
- 2. Research evidence isn't valued as an information input**
- 3. Research evidence isn't relevant**
- 4. Research evidence isn't easy to use**

# Addressing Challenge 1



## Challenge 1

- Research evidence competes with many other factors in the policymaking process
  - Institutional constraints (e.g., constitutional rules)
  - Interest group pressure
  - Other ideas such as citizens' values, tacit knowledge, real-world views and experiences)
  - External events (e.g., global recession)

## One option (among many) for addressing challenge 1

- Improve democratic processes (but this is beyond the scope of most of us) or create 'routine' mechanisms (as many countries have done for technology assessments and environmental assessments)

# Addressing Challenge 2



## Challenge 2

- Research evidence isn't valued as an information input

## One option (among many) for addressing challenge 2

- Encourage policymakers (and stakeholders) to place value on the use of research evidence by highlighting examples from the past or from other jurisdictions where research made the difference between policy/program success and failure (or communication success and failure [WHO and World Bank, REACH Uganda, Science-ish])

# Addressing Challenge 3



## Challenge 3

- Research evidence isn't relevant

## One option (among many) for addressing challenge 3

- Engage policymakers (and stakeholders) periodically in priority-setting processes and communicate the priorities to researchers [EVIPNet Cameroon, EMRO]
  - Long-term requirements for data-collection systems and for new primary research
  - Medium-term term requirements for systematic reviews
  - Short-term requirements for 'evidence briefs'



# Addressing Challenge 4a



## Challenge 4

- Research evidence isn't easy to use

## Challenge 4a

- Research evidence isn't communicated effectively (i.e., policymakers (& stakeholders) hear noise, not music)

## Two options (among many) for addressing challenge 4a

- Prepare and disseminate an evidence brief for policy (as an input to a deliberative dialogue) [EVIPNet, McMaster Health Forum]
- Develop and execute a knowledge-translation plan for a study or review (asking what's the message, to whom should it be directed, by whom should it be delivered, how should it be delivered, and with what effect)



# Addressing Challenge 4b



## Challenge 4

- Research evidence isn't easy to use

## Challenge 4b

- Research evidence isn't available when policymakers need it and in a form that they can use

## Four options (among many) for addressing challenge 4b

- Promote the use of the right 'one-stop shop' for research evidence about policy-related questions
  - Cochrane Library / Evidence Updates for clinical
  - Health-evidence.ca for public health
  - Health Systems Evidence for health systems (which includes a free monthly evidence service)

# Addressing Challenge 4b (cont'd)



## Four options (among many) for addressing challenge 4b (cont'd)

- Create a clearinghouse of national policy-relevant documents [ZAMFOHR, EIHR Portal]
- Provide policymaker- and stakeholder-targeted training workshops and related tools that provide the knowledge and skills needed to find and use research evidence efficiently [EXTRA, EVIPNet, MHF, SUPPORT Tools]
- Maintain a rapid-response capacity among key partners who can collectively deliver the many types of research evidence that will be needed (assessed, synthesized and packaged in ways that make it easy to use) [REACH Uganda, EVIPNet Burkina Faso & Cameroon, ZAMFOHR and soon – we hope -- MHF]

# Addressing Challenge 4c



## Challenge 4

- Research evidence isn't easy to use

## Challenge 4c

- Policymakers (and stakeholders) lack mechanisms to prompt them to use research in policymaking

## One option (among many) for addressing challenge 4c

- Propose changes to cabinet submission and program planning processes to prompt analysts to summarize whether and how research evidence informed the definition of the problem, the framing of options to address the problem, and the proposed approach to implementation [Ontario's Research Evidence Tool]

# Addressing Challenge 4d



## Challenge 4

- Research evidence isn't easy to use

## Challenge 4d

- Policymakers lack forums where system challenges can be discussed with stakeholders and researchers

## One option (among many) for addressing challenge 4d

- Convene deliberative dialogues (sometimes called policy dialogues or stakeholder dialogues) at which a pre-circulated evidence brief serves as the starting point for off-the-record deliberations involving policymakers, stakeholders and researchers

# A Healthy Ecosystem Requires All of These Challenges to Be Addressed



- 1. Research isn't valued as an information input [General climate for research use]**
- 2. Research isn't relevant [Production]**
- 3. Research isn't easy to use [Translation]**
  - a. Research isn't communicated effectively [Push]
  - b. Research isn't available when policymakers need it and in a form that they can use [Facilitating pull]
  - c. Policymakers lack mechanisms to prompt them to use research in decision-making [Pull]
  - d. Policymakers lack forums where policy challenges can be discussed with key stakeholders [Exchange]

# A Healthy Ecosystem Also Requires Rigorous Evaluation of Parts / Whole



## **Activities and outputs**

- Evidence briefs and stakeholder dialogues (both formative and summative evaluations)

## **Outcomes and impacts**

- Greater availability of research evidence on priority issues, stronger relationships between researchers & policymakers, and greater policymaker capacity to find and use research evidence
- Impacts on the policymaking process

**Context and its influence on which activities and outputs are prioritized and whether and how they achieve outcomes and impacts**



# What Made the Big Difference in the Canadian Province of Ontario?



- 1. Research isn't valued as an information input**  
**[General climate for research use]** – Clear signals from the top, new performance criterion for civil servants
- 2. Research isn't relevant [Production]**
- 3. Research isn't easy to use [Translation]**
  - a. Research isn't communicated effectively [Push]
  - b. Research isn't available when policymakers need it and in a form that they can use [Facilitating pull]
  - c. Policymakers lack mechanisms to prompt them to use research in decision-making [Pull] – Research Evidence Tool, training of the 'bosses' and the doers
  - d. Policymakers lack forums where policy challenges can be discussed with key stakeholders [Exchange]

# Which Challenges is Australia Addressing Well or Poorly?



- 1. Research isn't valued as an information input [General climate for research use]**
- 2. Research isn't relevant [Production]**
- 3. Research isn't easy to use [Translation]**
  - a. Research isn't communicated effectively [Push]
  - b. Research isn't available when policymakers need it and in a form that they can use [Facilitating pull]
  - c. Policymakers lack mechanisms to prompt them to use research in decision-making [Pull]
  - d. Policymakers lack forums where policy challenges can be discussed with key stakeholders [Exchange]



**Do you want to change the programs and services on offer, or the system that determines whether the ‘right’ mix of programs and services get to the right people?**

**Evidence-informed policymaking about systems is an achievable goal (not an oxymoron) provided that**

- We recognize that research evidence is just one input into policymaking (and it can be used in many ways and in each stage of the policymaking process)
- We work hard to develop (and test) innovative strategies to support the use of research evidence in policymaking as part of multi-faceted initiatives that are adapted to the local context

# Wrap Up (2)



**Does the policymaking process in Australia provide the same 'ways in' for research evidence as the process in other countries?**

**What does evidence-informed policymaking mean?**

**What challenges in using research evidence in policymaking is Australia addressing well or poorly?**



Lavis JN, Oxman AD, Lewin S, Fretheim A: SUPPORT Tools for evidence-informed health Policymaking (STP). Introduction. **Health Research Policy and Systems** 2009, 7(Suppl 1):I1 doi:10.1186/1478-4505-7-S1-I1.

Lavis JN. How can we support the use of systematic reviews in policymaking? **PLoS Medicine** 2009; 6(11): e1000141.

Evidence briefs and dialogue summaries on 20+ topics on the **McMaster Health Forum** website ([www.mcmasterhealthforum.org](http://www.mcmasterhealthforum.org))

# Resources (2)



Tools and resources available on **Health Systems Evidence** ([www.healthsystemsevidence.org](http://www.healthsystemsevidence.org))

- Searchable database and monthly evidence service
- Downloadable PDFs
  - Finding & using research evidence ('cheat sheet')
  - Hyperlinked list of SUPPORT tools
  - Backgrounder on Health Systems Evidence
  - Backgrounder on the EIHR Portal
  - Top ten resources to support EIP
- Videos
  - Finding & using research evidence (3 \* 20 minutes)
  - HSE (5 minutes) / EIHR Portal (5 minutes)