Integrating Evidence Into Health Policy: Navigating Cross-sectoral and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

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Introduction
While there is substantial demand for systematic and evidence-based public health policy,1,2 the process of translating public health research into policy remains underdeveloped. Using evidence to inform public health decision-making has been proven effective,3 but the current body of literature lacks detail about the role of research in actual legislative processes.4,5

This systematic review assesses the extent to which evidence is used in European public health decision-making practice, along with highlighting barriers and facilitators to developing and implementing evidence-based policy.

Methods
Two reviewers used terms including evidence-based, public health, policymaking, and Europe to search for articles across seven databases:

- PubMed
- Cochrane Library
- PubMed Central
- Embase
- Web of Science
- Science Citation Index

Records identified through database searching (n = 2525)

Records after duplicates removed (n = 2454)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 71)

Full-text articles included for review (n = 36)

Records identified through additional sources

Exclusion criteria
- Study conducted outside of Europe
- Other than English
- Lacked peer review
- Full text unavailable

Records identified through additional sources (n = 41)

Study participants
Of the 36 studies examined in this review, the majority (n=27) reported analysis based on interviews and surveys which gathered input from diverse perspectives, including:

- Policies, professionals
- Community members
- Healthcare professionals
- Researchers

Factors that Facilitate Evidence-based Policy

- Awareness of and access to research unrestricted by fees or subscription requirements
- Availability and Applicability

- Interdisciplinary Collaboration

- Political Alignment

- Research valued as a source of legitimate evidence

- Unforeseen Domain

- Barriers to Generating Evidence-based Policy

- Limited Resources

- Low Effect

- Interdisciplinary Collaboration

- Unforeseen Domain

- Policy-makers wary of bias in evidence making practice

- Policy-makers wary of being used as sources of evidence

- Policy-makers wary of bias in evidence making practice

- Policy-makers wary of being used as sources of evidence

Results
One-third of studies (n=10) discussed the widely varying interpretations of the definition of evidence as a complicating factor in the examination of evidence integration in health policy. In addition to illustrating fundamental differences between the professionals of policy research and policymaking, this lack of consensus can hinder collaboration by generating tension. Study participants reported a range of sources used as evidence to inform policy, including:

- Personal experience
- Policy evidence
- Public opinion

Generalizability
The results of this review are specific to the public health practices and public health literature existing in Europe, and cannot be generalized to settings outside of Europe.

Exclusion criteria
The search methodology and a limitation of exclusion in this study may have affected the results and conclusions of this review.

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Implications
Researchers can build relationships with policymakers by including stakeholders throughout the research process, securing funding from nongovernmental sources, publicly releasing outcomes, and gaining expertise in politics to better understand application context and advance research literacy.

Research organizations can dedicate resources to investigating pertinent topics and repositioning negative perceptions about evidence, existing influencers, such as political processes (e.g. campaign donors, lobbying, advocacy groups, established parties) can be harnessed to amplify demand for policies based on evidence.

Topics for Further Investigation
- Document logistical details and strategies used in policy-research collaborations to develop best practices
- Explore system-level functions for potential interventions (e.g. transparency, local government
- Demonstrate value and public opinion - evidence-based public health policy and positive outcomes