Connecting Evidence to Action: The Role of Research in the Policy-Making Process

ICTR D&I Short Course
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Attribution of Source Material

AcademyHealth

CIHR IRSC

PREVENTION RESEARCH CENTER in St. Louis
Promoting Healthy Communities

Ross C. Brownson
Washington University in St. Louis

Three Questions

What is policy and why does it matter?

When and how can evidence affect policy?

How can we connect research and policy in Wisconsin?

What is policy and why does it matter?

What Is Policy?

- *Public policy is about what governments do, why, and with what consequences (Fenna 2004:3)*

- *Politics is about who gets what, when, and how. (Lasswell, 1951)*

- Courses of action or inaction

- Made by governments: federal, state, local

- Legislative, Regulatory, and Sub-regulatory

- The absence of policy can also have positive or negative impacts

What Policy Matters

CDC: Ten great public health achievements – United States, 1900-1999	
Immunizations	Tobacco as a Health Hazard
Motor Vehicle Safety	Safer and Healthier Foods
Workplace Safety	Healthier Mothers and Babies
Flouridation of Drinking Water	Control of Infectious Disease
Family Planning	Declines in Deaths from Heart Disease & Stroke

When and how can evidence affect policy?

Linear Model: The Fantasy Equation

Experts provide research → Evidence disseminated → Decision makers create policy

Health Systems Evidence

Evidence to support decision-making –
An online repository of synthesized research evidence for
health system policymakers, managers and stakeholders

What is Health Systems Evidence?

A newly re-designed, **easy-to-search** and **continuously updated** online repository of **synthesized research evidence** related to governance, financial and delivery arrangements in health systems and to implementation strategies that can support change within health systems.

Health Systems Evidence at
www.healthsystemsevidence.org

Types of Evidence Use

Instrumental

Conceptual

Strategic or Tactical

Factors that Shape the Use of Evidence

What?
- *The nature of the evidence*

Who?
- *Personal characteristics of both researchers and users*
- *Links between research and its users*

- When and how?
  - *Context matters*

"You have your evidence, I have my evidence"

Challenges

For the policy maker:
- Poor timing
- Lack of relevant data
- Competing priorities and demands

For the Researcher:
- Mismatch of randomized thinking with non-random problems
- Lack of control over the independent variable
- Where to enter/access the policy process

Evidence is only one component of policymaking; Our job is to try to elevate its role.

Dissemination and Implementation: Definitions

Dissemination is the intentional, active process of spreading evidence-based interventions to the target audience via determined channels using planned strategies.

- Focuses on spreading knowledge of evidence and informing audiences

Implementation is the use of strategies to adopt and integrate evidence-based health interventions, and change practice patterns within specific settings

- Builds on that knowledge by considering evidence in context and developing appropriate strategies to facilitate and maintain the use of evidence

Knowledge translation (KT) is a process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange.

- This process takes place within a complex system of interactions between researchers and knowledge users that may vary in intensity, complexity and level of engagement depending on the nature of the research and the findings as well as the needs of the particular knowledge user.

Levels of Process

Knowledge synthesis
- Integration of research findings of individual studies within the larger body of knowledge

Dissemination
- Involves identifying the appropriate audience for the research findings, and tailoring the message and medium to the audience

Knowledge exchange
- Refers to the interaction between the knowledge user and the researcher resulting in mutual learning.
- It encompasses the concept of collaborative or participatory, action-oriented research where researchers and knowledge users work together as partners to conduct research to solve knowledge users' problems

When Does the Researcher Engage with Policy?

End-of-grant KT

The researcher develops and implements a plan for making knowledge users aware of the knowledge generated through a research project

Integrated KT

Research approaches that **engage potential knowledge users as partners** in the research process through a collaborative approach to research that is action oriented and focused on solutions and impact

Integrative Knowledge Transfer/Exchange

Is a way of doing research -- **an approach, not a method**

- Is collaborative, participatory, action-oriented research; co-production of knowledge
- Involves engaging and integrating knowledge users into the research process

Knowledge users can be:

- Policy makers, decision makers, researchers, the public, industry, clinicians, the media

Integrative Knowledge Transfer/Exchange

Knowledge users and creators (researchers) can work together to:

- Shape the research questions
- Decide on the methodology
- Help with data collection and tools development
- Interpret study findings and craft messaging around them
- Move the research results into practice
- Conduct widespread dissemination and application

Responsible Dissemination and KT

- Results from a single research study should be contextualized within global research results before extraordinary dissemination or implementation efforts are undertaken

- Bring common sense and academic rigor to decisions on the degree and intensity of KT activities warranted by a single research study

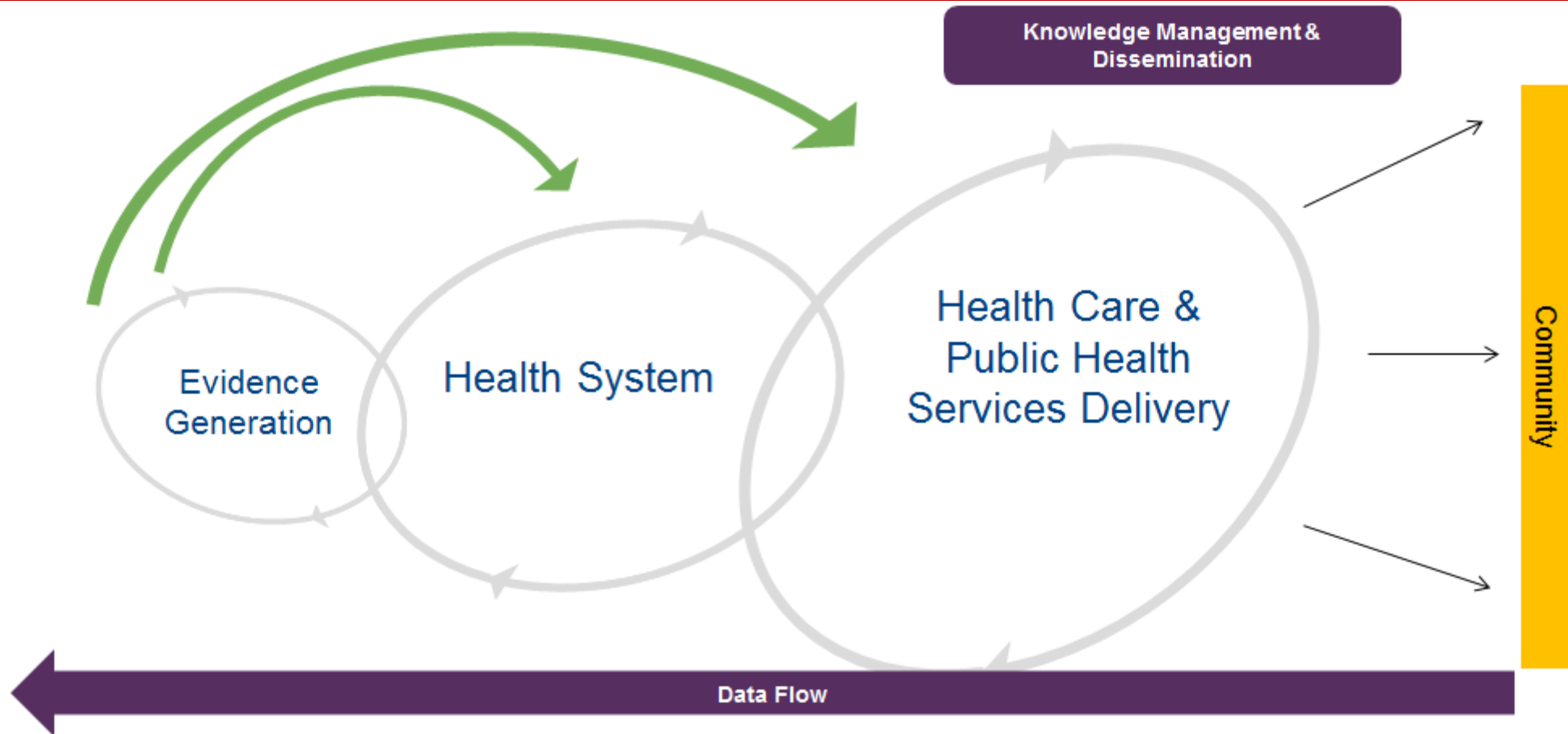# Generating Evidence and Transferring Knowledge: A two-way process

Figure derived from: IOM (Institute of Medicine). 2011. Engineering a learning healthcare system: A look at the future: Workshop summary. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

How can we connect research to policy in Wisconsin?

Evidence-Based Health Policy Project

Research - Analysis - Education - Dialogue

Partnership of UW SMPH, La Follette School of Public Affairs, Legislative Council, with Chancellor's matching support

Elevate the role of evidence in health policy decision making by conveying timely, nonpartisan, high quality evidence

Magic

Increase the involvement of UW faculty research, teaching, and programmatic activities in topical issues of state public policy

EBHPP Briefings

Past briefings have dealt with topics including…

- *ACO Innovators: Health System Transformation in Wisconsin*

- *Cancer, Chronic Disease, and Communities: A New Look at Wisconsin's Obesity Problem*

- *E-Cigarettes: An Update on the Science and Policy*

- *Evidence-Based Treatment (and Recovery) Programs for Opioid Addiction*

- *Shift Your Perspective: Population-Based Approaches to Children's Mental Health*

How to Assess Impact
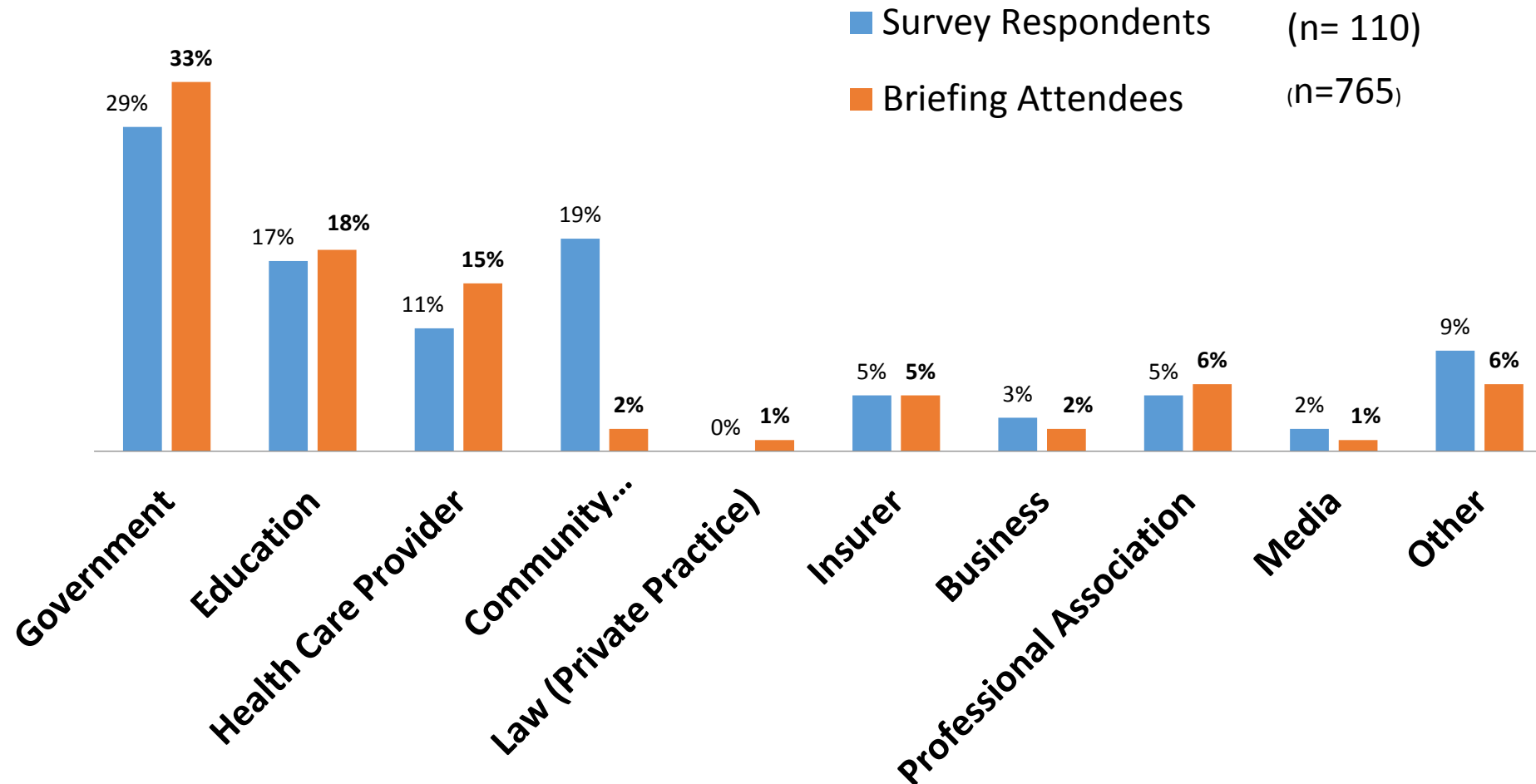
Creating a "Culture of Evidence Use"

Are we engaging policy players from all segments?

Is there networking or collaboration among them?

Are we a trusted messenger?

Is evidence we provide "used"?

Comparison to occupational breakdown of all participants at briefings 2011-2014

Survey Respondents (n= 110)
Briefing Attendees (n=765)

Category	Survey Respondents	Briefing Attendees
Government	29%	33%
Education	17%	18%
Health Care Provider	11%	15%
Community...	19%	2%
Law (Private Practice)	0%	1%
Insurer	5%	5%
Business	3%	2%
Professional Association	5%	6%
Media	2%	1%
Other	9%	6%

How is Evidence Being Used?

Answer		Response	%
To seek further information		56	57%
To determine best policy		25	26%
To aid in decision-making		38	39%
To have a more in-depth understanding of the issue		79	81%
To support a particular position		21	21%
Other		5	5%

Value Brought by EBHPP

The EBHPP influence derives from:

- Unique partnerships, including with Legislative Council
- Sustained track record of delivering on the promise of timely, relevant, nonpartisan, high quality information and activities
- Flexible, responsive formats and methods to connect research to policy deliberation process
- Relationships cultivated with key players

Lasting, sustained impact on health requires lasting, sustained engagement with the policy making process

What does success look like?

- Build the infrastructure that can answer the questions that people care about.

- Generate relevant and timely evidence with public and decision-leader buy-in

- Facilitate and enable researcher involvement in the policy-making process

- Raise awareness in the policy arena about the availability and utility of expertise from academic partners

Questions?

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