

Engaging Policy-Makers, Health System Managers and Policy Analysts in the Knowledge Synthesis Process: A Scoping Review

Summary

To increase policy and practice relevance of research questions and enhance uptake of research findings in decision-making, health systems and research funders are encouraging engagement of knowledge users and relevant stakeholders in the research process. However, the opportunities and approaches to engaging a wide range of knowledge users remain largely unexplored. We mapped the evidence on engaging policy-makers, health system managers, and policy analysts in the knowledge synthesis process. We found that engaging knowledge users usually occurs at the beginning or end of the knowledge synthesis process. However, ongoing engagement throughout the review process may lead to more relevant and user-friendly results.

Implications

The type and frequency of engagement should be meaningful and tailored to available resources, including time and funding. Researchers should document and evaluate engagement activities in knowledge synthesis on an ongoing basis to learn from their experiences.

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What is the current situation?

- Engaging knowledge users in the research process provides an opportunity to increase relevance of findings and reduce waste
- Health policy-makers, policy analysts, and health system managers are increasingly commissioning knowledge synthesis to meet their decision-making needs
- Evidence is required to guide effective, efficient and meaningful knowledge user engagement in the conduct of knowledge synthesis

What is the objective?

- To map the evidence on opportunities, approaches, as well as barriers and facilitators to engaging knowledge users in the knowledge synthesis process with an emphasis on policy-makers, health system managers and policy analysts

How was the review conducted?

- The review was guided by the Joanna Briggs Institute Methods Manual for scoping reviews.
- Nine electronic databases (e.g., MEDLINE), two grey literature sources (e.g., OpenSIGLE), and reference lists of relevant systematic reviews were searched.
- Reports describing opportunities, approaches or barriers and facilitators to engagement of policy-makers, health system managers, and policy analysts in the knowledge synthesis process were included.
- Screening and data abstraction were conducted by two reviewers independently with a third reviewer resolving discrepancies. Frequency and thematic analyses were conducted.

What did the review find?

- Reporting 84 documents and 7 companion reports that were published in the last 10 years met eligibility criteria.
- The most common type of knowledge synthesis with knowledge user engagement was a systematic review (36%).
- Policy-makers were the most common (64%) knowledge users, followed by healthcare professionals (49%) and government agencies as well as patients and caregivers (34%).
- Knowledge users were engaged in conceptualization and design (49%), search and data collection (52%), data synthesis and interpretation (71%) and knowledge dissemination and application (44%).
- Knowledge user content expertise/awareness was a common facilitator (18%), while lack of time or opportunity to participate was a common barrier (12%).