

Healthy Balance Research Program Policy Advisory Committee Evaluation Final Report

HBRP Policy Stream

The Policy Stream of the Healthy Balance Research Program (HBRP) was an integral part of the final year of activities for the HRBP focusing on Knowledge Translation and Uptake. Knowledge Translation is described as the cycle through which research is 'translated' into the language, tools or materials that can be used by the general population – it is one means by which research produces a benefit to the community (CIHR website). With that purpose in mind the policy stream was intended to encourage the use of the research generated by HBRP to influence public policy and program development. The activities of the policy stream have included a review of existing policies and programs relevant to unpaid caregivers, a thematic review of the collective research findings, and the formation of a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) to aid in the development of a theoretical framework and policy recommendations.

The mandate of the Policy Advisory Committee was to provide:

1. consultation and advice on the development of a set of recommendations based on the findings of HBRP;
2. expertise on specific programs, policies or issues relevant to the development of policy recommendations; and
3. opportunities for networking and knowledge transfer between researchers, the public and private sectors and community groups.

The Policy Advisory Committee included members of community organizations, Equity Reference Group members, provincial and federal government agencies and departments, and the private sector.

Based on the research generated by HBRP we can now accurately describe the realities of women's unpaid caregiving in Nova Scotia and the relationship between women's lives and policy. With this understanding we can discuss what an optimal caregiving context may look like.

Policy Advisory Committee Evaluation

The evaluation of the Policy Advisory Committee was the final stage of the Healthy Balance Research Program.

Methodology and Analysis

A questionnaire, approved through the university ethics committee, was administered to members of the committee to evaluate whether the objectives and anticipated outcomes had been achieved. Format of the questionnaire included five questions and sub-questions with a mix of opened ended and ranking questions using a likert scale. Manual analysis was carried out and the responses were assessed for both common themes and consensus of thoughts.

Analysis also involved looking for responses that differed significantly from the majority of answers. Responses from the field notes of the project assistants were analysed separately.

Participants

The membership of the PAC consisted of 12 women from community organizations, Equity Reference Group members, provincial and federal government agencies and departments, and the private sector. In the Fall of 2006, signed consent was received from the nine members of the PAC. Subsequently, six completed questionnaires were returned. In addition, the two project assistants provided their own field notes from their experience in response to the questions.

Findings

Policy Advisory Committee Members

Overall, the responses from the six PAC members on all questions were very positive. Table 1 provides a summary of the responses.

Project Assistants

Meetings were organised and co-facilitated by the two project assistants. Table 2 contains a summary of the field notes that were organised around the questions that the participants were asked.

Discussion

In general, both the participants and the facilitators thought the collaborative research process was an excellent approach that should be used in future projects. Both perspectives agreed that the policy advisory committee process would have benefited from being introduced earlier in the overall program. The challenge of balancing other commitments was noted by both the facilitators and participants which, given the overall focus of the research program on work-life balance for women, is not surprising especially since this was a commitment outside of the typical daily lives of the participants. While participants found the diversity of the committee enriching, the facilitators, while noting the value of various perspectives, also found this part of the logistical challenge of managing both the meetings and output. The reality of scheduling conflicts would probably exist with any group regardless of size but a smaller size would likely lose the diversity which was already underrepresented for all ERGs.

Recommendation

Based on the value added in the collaborative research process in particular for the incorporation of a policy advisory committee as confirmed by this evaluation, future research projects should not only include this process but introduce it earlier in the overall program design. Inclusion of a rich diversity of backgrounds and experience, although challenging logistically, is a key element of participatory research. Consideration for sustainability once programs end as well as a mechanism for measuring policy outcomes going forward would enhance the productivity of the process.

Summary of PAC Evaluation Table 1

Q	Category	Response of PAC members		Exceptions		
1	Input	Participants felt that they were encouraged to participate in a respectful manner and that their input was reflected in final recommendations.				
2	Networking and future participation	All the participants felt they had ample opportunity to network and form new relationships that enriched their knowledge, experience, and was valuable and relevant in other aspects of their lives. All indicated they would participate in the future if the opportunity arose.		Two participants mentioned competing commitments as a barrier to participating as fully as they would have liked.		
3 a.	Ranking of topics 1 = none 2 = some 3 = significant	Topic	Mean (range)			
		Knowledge Translation (KT)	2.2 (2-3)			
		Gender Based Analysis (GBA)	2.0 (1-3)			
		Healthy Balance Model (HBM)	2.3 (2-3)			
		Equity Reference Groups (ERG)	2.3 (1-3)			
		Collaborative Research Process (CRP)	2.5 (2-3)			
		Women's Unpaid Caregiving (UPC)	2.8 (2-3)			
3 b.	Most Valuable Topics	Inside Committee	Outside Committee	The unclear response from one participant referred to "actual content" as the most valuable learning		
		CRP	2		CRP	1
		ERG	2		ERG	1
		UPC	1		UPC	2
		Unclear	1		KT	1
		Unclear	1			
4	Ranking of Meeting Logistics: Poor = P Good = G Very Good = VG	Item	Rank			
		Presentation Format	2-G, 4-VG			
		Materials & Handouts	2-G, 4-VG			
		Presentation Content	2-G, 4-VG			
		Meeting Times	2-G, 4-VG			
		Networking Lunch	6- VG			
		Location	6-VG			
5 a.	Overall Experience	All participants described the experience as positive and productive. Relationships, respect, and valuing of input were reiterated as important and valuable aspects of the process.		Time restraints were mentioned as the most significant concern whether it was personal or meeting length and frequency.		
5 b.	Process recommendations	Overall, participants thought meetings should start earlier in the research process and have more meetings overall. Face-to-face meetings are preferable to email reviews and conference calls.		One participant thought less frequent meetings but longer duration.		
5 c.	Other	Lack of a communications plan; concern for sustainability of the work with HBRP				

Summary of Project Assistant's Field Notes Table 2

Q	Category	Response
1	Input	Diversity of experience and backgrounds of the members provided both richness and challenges in inclusivity of input. When all members were present, this was it was even more challenging to hear all voices in a way that respected the input of all but also incorporated the diverse opinions. Scheduling of meetings at times that were convenient for all members was a challenge and lead to a core group of 5 or 6 members that were at most or all meetings. The diversity of the members provided networking opportunities to build relationships which would not have been otherwise possible. Despite the varied backgrounds, all of the participants showed respect and consideration of other opinions. Greater participation by program co-directors would have strengthened the process.
2	Networking and Participation	The process was invaluable in offering new avenues for dissemination as well as highlighting the importance of engaging in inter-sectoral, inter-disciplinary, and inter-generational collaboration by bringing together the perspectives of those most influential and those most influenced by the policy outcomes.
3	Value of Topics	Different members came in with different areas of expertise and different levels of understanding of the topics. This allowed for sharing of expertise by different members at different times contributing to an expansion of knowledge and understanding for all participants. The input and insight of the Equity Reference Group members was particularly valuable for highlighting advice and suggestions that might otherwise have been overlooked.
4	Meeting Logistics	Not applicable
5	Overall Experience and Recommendations	Initial meetings were most challenging in terms of preparation and facilitation but by the 3 rd meeting, excellent working relationships had been established. The value of the input provided strengthened the opportunities and outcomes that might not have been available otherwise. Not all ERG's were represented which might have been improved if the PAC had been introduced earlier in the process in addition to more clearly defined roles and responsibilities and orientation at the outset of the committee. Outside commitments of members was often a challenge to balance with participation. One of the facilitators felt a smaller group would have allowed for greater participation.