



National Collaborating Centre
for Methods and Tools

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Webcast:

Introduction to Evidence-Informed Public Health



I'm Donna Ciliska, Scientific Director of the National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools.

The National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada and located at McMaster University.

Welcome to this series of sessions on Evidence-Informed Public Health. This webcast will introduce you to all of the steps of Evidence-Informed Public Health.

First I'd like to say a few words about all six of the National Collaborating Centres for Public Health in Canada. There's a centre that deals with a particular population which is Aboriginal Health and they're located in Prince George, Northern British Columbia. The Environmental Health Group is located in Vancouver, the Infectious Disease Group is in Winnipeg and the Healthy Public Policy Group is in Montreal and Quebec City. The Determinants of Health group is located in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. The National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools is located at McMaster University in Hamilton.

We're interested in dealing with methods and tools for knowledge translation in public health – not tools that are useful for clinical practice or community assessment, but actually what works to get public health evidence into place.

First of all, let's talk about what we mean by Evidence-Informed Public Health.

It is the process of finding, appraising, distilling and disseminating the best available evidence from research – both quantitative and qualitative research – and using that evidence to inform and improve health policy and practice.

It's important to focus on the fact that we're talking about the best research because, even though we ideally would like to have high-quality systematic reviews of randomized trials, that's often not possible in public health, and so we're dealing with finding the best available evidence. That may be a cohort study or a cross sectional study that would be useful for answering the questions we have about practice and policy. Put simply, evidence-informed public health means finding, using and sharing what works best in public health.

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I'd like to review a model that we've developed for looking at evidence-informed public health.

In making any decision about a policy or practice for a community, you have to first think about the community issues. What's the local context for this issue of concern?

Secondly, think about what the community preference would be in terms of actually accepting or using an intervention that you might offer and what political forces would either to support or work against this intervention.

For a long time we've ignored the research evidence in public health. A lot of the focus of evidence-informed public health is actually getting us to find and use evidence and to bring that evidence to bear in the decision making.

And a very critical piece is to look at how many resources – the money, the human resources – we have to bring to this particular community issue.

Then it takes a considerable expertise on the part of individuals and groups to bring all of these factors together to make the final decision.

Now, it sometimes looks like we're blindly applying research or that we're promoting the idea of applying research without considering these other factors. That's never the case.

Research cannot be applied without considering all of the other factors in this model. Often the most important factor for determining the decision has to do with political process, the community will or the resources, and not the research.

You may find some very high-quality evidence that will not work in your community.

But, in some cases, we've ignored research and there's some very good research that exists for public health. We would like to bring that to bear to decision making in evidence-informed public health.

So, in this series, we're going to go through all of the stages involved in evidence-informed public health – an overview – beginning with defining the question.



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When you define the question, you want to be very concise and clear about what actual issue is under consideration. If you're not clear, if you go and look very broadly for a particular issue like respiratory diseases for example, you'll find thousands of hits in any database which will be too overwhelming to even begin to answer your question.

The next piece is to conduct a very efficient search. As I said, if your search is too broad, when looking at a database, there's so much research now that exists that it's easy to get overwhelmed.

We have a goal that everyone should be able to find the very best evidence about a question in five minutes or less. But, to do that requires the development of some skills in searching.

The next step is to do the critical appraisal, that's critically and efficiently appraising the studies that you do find. You will find studies of varying degrees within the research literature. How do you know which one to pay attention to? How do you know which one is the most applicable to your community? And, if you find five or six of those studies that are giving you conflicting conclusions about this particular intervention, how do you know which one to pay attention to?

How do you interpret the information and form recommendations for practice and policy? Even if you decide that this is very high-quality research that you're going to pay attention to, the next point is to adapt the information to your own local community.

Will this particular intervention work in your community given the political context and people's willingness to use this information?

If you think it's going to work and it can be adapted to your local community, the next step is to implement the information.

How do you go about planning so that you get health care practitioners or policy makers to actually use this research in the local context?

And finally, how do you evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation that you've undertaken, or whether or not the policy has been put in place? Are practitioners actually changing their behaviour? And, finally, what impact does that have on the community?

So now we've gone through all of the stages of evidence-informed public health. Subsequent sessions will go through each of those stages in much more detail.

I'd like to thank you for spending some time with these sessions and to draw your attention to our websites, where you'll find tools and methods for each one of these phases.

The website is www.nccmt.ca or the French version is www.ccnmo.ca.

Thank you very much.

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