

Prevention Centre work plan Objective 2.2

“Clear consensus statements about the evidence in relation to key aspects of prevention based on the best available evidence syntheses, summaries of Australian program experience and audits of economic data”.

Introduction

The Centre’s work plan outlines a number of projects aimed at ensuring evidence and other forms of knowledge about prevention are more readily available to policy makers. The plan includes objectives to develop consensus statements and policy briefs on what is known from published evidence and program delivery experience, with particular focus on relevance for Australian policy settings.

Since its launch, the work of the Prevention Centre has continued to evolve, and we have enhanced our capacity to conceive and implement dynamic systems-based approaches to evidence synthesis, knowledge exchange, and consensus building on prevention policy options. This paper outlines some of the developments in our approach.

A systems approach to consensus building

Many approaches to consensus development aim to deliver outputs in the form of consensus statements and/or best practice guidelines. These outputs provide a valuable compilation of evidence and professional expertise, and rely on effective dissemination and implementation strategies to promote their adoption into policy and practice.

The Prevention Centre has adopted a dynamic and iterative approach for building consensus on prevention policies and programs, with less focus on consensus statements and more on collaborative policy dialogues that are supported by systems-based methods and tools. The goals of systems-based consensus building are to value diverse evidence and experience, generate shared understanding of the policy options and their likely impacts, and support ongoing research-policy-practice knowledge exchange.

For example, participatory simulation models that are developed collaboratively and transparently with a diverse group of experts can assist in building consensus on the relative merits, risks and costs of alternative policy options. The outputs of such models will then be used to inform broader policy dialogues to determine which of those options can and should be pursued. Both types of policy dialogues will generate knowledge synthesis products that can be shared more widely, including the interactive simulation models themselves that forecast the likely impacts of different policy options, and subsequently the action statements on the preferred policy options.

Thus while a final consensus on policy directions may not always be achieved – especially among those with opposing interests and objectives – policy dialogues that allow explicit and direct comparisons of policy options can achieve alignment of those with different perspectives but similar goals. Systems-informed policy

dialogues can also generate greater collaboration and trust so that when new information becomes available it can be more readily reviewed, and policy directions revised as needed.

Prevention Centre knowledge synthesis and communication products

Research translation initiatives rely on evidence reviews, summaries and policy briefs to provide concise information for policy settings. The importance and inherent value of these is acknowledged – and the Prevention Centre’s comprehensive program of work will generate a wide range of knowledge synthesis and communication products on chronic disease prevention. To ensure the local applicability and relevance of these products, the Prevention Centre seeks to facilitate a process of co-creation based on its inherent policy-practice-research partnerships. This enables the Prevention Centre to draw on valuable local experience to address directly the needs of local policy makers and practitioners.

While there is much diversity and interchange in the general use of terms, to facilitate discussion across the Prevention Centre we have sought to differentiate between the following: evidence reviews and summaries; policy briefs (and/or dynamic Simulation Models of policy options); action statements and prevention factsheets and soundbites. We delineate the purpose and target audience, production process, and likely sources of information for these products. We also highlight the Prevention Centre’s contribution (value-add) in developing this type of product, and opportunities for further innovation and research.

Evidence reviews are conducted as a starting point for most of the Centre’s projects to inform their program of work, including further research and evaluation, as well as to inform knowledge exchange processes, policy dialogues, and the first stages of consensus building – including participatory development of simulation models. The key findings of evidence reviews can be presented as short **evidence summaries**.

Policy briefs address policy-driven questions and present the findings of a policy analysis process that integrates research and expert knowledge. Policy briefs will often consider a number of policy options, which have been examined against the available evidence, as well as considered in the light of local policy and practice experience. Policy briefs may be derived from Prevention Centre’s activities such as implementation exchanges, cross-jurisdictional evaluation forums or other policy relevant dialogues.

Policy briefs are usually static overviews of policy options, whereas **simulation models** of policy interventions offer a much more dynamic policy analysis product. Simulation modelling enables a quantified synthesis of all available evidence and other forms of knowledge. The models offer significantly greater capacity to forecast and compare the likely impacts and costs of policy options over time, and these can be considered individually or in various combinations.

Policy briefs or simulation model forecasts will inform broader consensus building processes that will generate the Prevention Centre’s action statements. **Action statements** will make explicit areas of agreement and disagreement on preferred policy directions and recommended actions, and illuminate the different rationales for these.

Factsheets and soundbites are concise and engaging statements on established facts around chronic disease prevention on which there is substantive agreement among experts. Topics will often reflect the Prevention Centre Investigators’ areas of expertise and draw on their knowledge of the key literature. The factsheets and soundbites may be compiled to address an identified need of our funders, to communicate key points that advance the prevention agenda, correct common misconceptions, or advocate for prevention actions.

~ Prepared by Lucie Rychetnik, Sally Redman, Jo-An Atkinson and Marge Overs, June 2015