



Policy BUDDIES

Where Research Evidence Meets Policy

What was it?

Policy BUDDIES was an intervention funded by the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, World Health Organization, that matched sub-national policy-makers (such as deputy directors in various provincial health departments in Western Cape province in South Africa) with local researchers (buddies) in order to build capacity for and encourage the use of research evidence in health policy-making. The buddies then met, e-mailed, or called, to collaborate on health issues ranging from intervention design to guideline development.

Policy-makers also attended a workshop facilitated by the researchers aimed at increasing capacity to identify research questions, as well as to identify, evaluate, and use evidence from the highest quality research studies and reviews (systematic reviews).

Why use evidence in policy making?

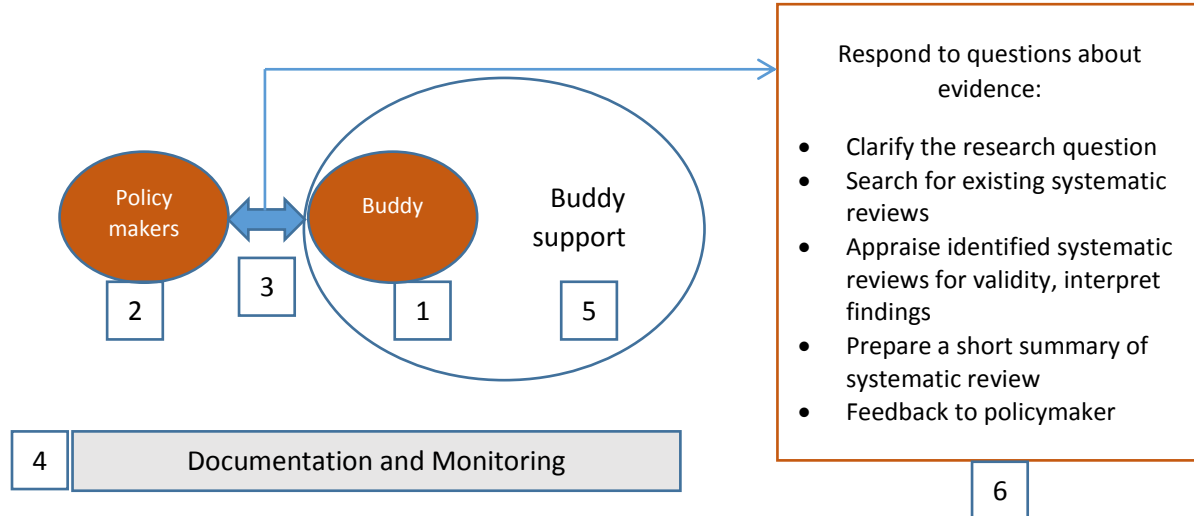
Evidence-informed policies coupled with well-executed implementation are likely to enable the achievement of the health-related goals, as well as a reduction in the burden of disease and improvements in health systems. On the other hand, poorly informed decision-making may contribute to problems related to effectiveness, efficiency and equity in health systems and outcomes.

Who participated?

Policy-makers had titles such as Deputy Director, Senior Manager, and Medical Officer and worked in provincial health departments.



How did policy BUDDIES help policy-makers use evidence?



By connecting policy-makers with expert researchers (buddies), policy-makers were able to access evidence such as systematic reviews and relevant research studies and received guidance from an objective third party on how to evaluate whether the research was valid and applicable or not.

What worked?

There was already a culture of evidence and demand for evidence use in South Africa. Policy-makers saw a need for evidence in their programmes, and this intervention improved their access to evidence. The researchers appreciated learning about policy-making and how to be more helpful when producing and disseminating evidence. The research team were considered thoughtful and independent experts by the policy-makers, and many already had worked with policy-makers, allowing for an easy transition to a closer working relationship. For contentious issues, this was especially important. Evidence was seen as particularly useful when it could be used to back-up decisions that weren't universally agreed on, or to provide confidence when challenging existing policies.

What didn't work?

Evidence often focused on effectiveness of different interventions and strategies, but policy-makers were also curious to see evidence on other policy models and operational strategies. Sometimes the research that had been done wasn't applicable to the programme, so there wasn't always perfectly matched evidence to base policy on. Lack of time to search for and interpret evidence was cited as a barrier by all policy-makers.

How can I learn more?

Contact Prof. Taryn Young, the Principal Investigator of this project at tyoung@sun.ac.za or find more at www.cebhc.co.za/policy-buddies.

Centre for Evidence-based Health Care, Stellenbosch University, website: www.sun.ac.za/cebhc