



How to make a Declaration make a difference

Instructions on achieving the best fit
between evidence policy and practice

Don Nutbeam



Warning

Don Watson describing his experience of the Keating government:

- “A large if not defining element of chaos... organised chaos, creative chaos but often it was just chaos or even hopeless chaos”

Quoted from:

Don Watson *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart*, 2002

(Political memoirs of the Keating era in Australian politics by the Prime Minister's chief political speech writer)



What is public policy?

- **Public policy-making** – “The process by which governments translate their **political vision** into programmes and actions to **deliver outcomes** - desired changes in the real world”

<http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/evalpolicy/index.asp>

- The **courses of action** that are taken to deliver these outcomes are mainly resource allocation, rules and regulations, and occasionally legislation
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Message 1

Don't be so cynical about the relationship between evidence, policy and practice

- Evidence can be far more influential on policy and practice than you think
 - Most politicians are intelligent and want to do the right thing
 - We need to understand in more sophisticated ways the relationships between evidence, policy and practice
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How does policy emerge?

- Policy making is rarely an “event”, it tends to emerge and evolve over time, subject to continuous re-interpretation of information, with no definite beginning or end
 - Timing of decisions dictated by political considerations rather than state of evidence
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What influences policy change?

- Derived from balance between what is:
 - scientifically plausible (evidence based)
 - politically acceptable (fit with vision, balance of interests), and
 - practical for implementation
 - powers and resources available
 - systems, structures and capacity for action in place
 - feasible to take action
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Message 2

Take a liberal view of what constitutes evidence

“Good quality policy-making depends upon information from a variety of sources - expert knowledge; existing domestic and international research;.... stakeholder consultation, ...evaluation of previous policies...

There is a great deal of critical evidence held in the minds of both the front line staff in departments, agencies and local authorities to whom the policy is directed.”

<http://www.policyhub.gov.uk/evalpolicy/index.asp>



Message 3

Make more evidence that is relevant to policy and practice

- Vast amount of evidence **describing the problem**
- Relatively little evidence to guide decisions on **how to solve it**
- Inverse relationship between the volume and quality of evidence, and the potential effectiveness of interventions

(ie higher volume of evidence on behavioural and risk factor modification, relative to social, environmental and economic interventions)



Cochrane Collaboration on Tobacco addiction

Review of database:

- “Most health professionals believe they should help people who wish to stop”
- “It is difficult to recommend one approach over another”
- “Social attitudes, legislation and public health measures influence change in tobacco use. Against this background, many smokers give up without clinical intervention”

(Lancaster et al BMJ 2000)



What is the relevance of this in deciding on tobacco policy?

What interventions are most powerful (SC's inverse law)?

- Is it advertising bans, price increases, restrictions in public places, media campaigns to change public opinion - for which we have no information on the Cochrane database
- or is it nicotine replacement therapy, physician advice or telephone counselling for which we are advised:

“It is difficult to recommend one approach over another”

The policy question:

- What combination, in what order will produce the greatest effect?
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Messages 4 and 5

- Find ways of making the evidence fit with political priorities/political vision

(Fiona's law)

- Find ways of making a political priority of those things for which we have evidence through effective public health advocacy

(Simon's way)



Message 6

Identify practical examples of action and consider how to scale it up

- Be in a position to answer the questions:
 - What can I do?
 - What is the best buy?
 - Persuade me it can be done in a political lifetime
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Concluding remarks

- Evidence is influential if
 - it is available when needed,
 - it can be made to “fit” with current political vision and priority, and with cultural norms, and
 - offers practical actions
 - Public health advocacy can help ensure that the evidence becomes a political priority and socially acceptable
 - Transfer of policy into practice depends fundamentally on good practical ideas and the application of resources – legislation enables, supports, reinforces
 - Choose your government carefully
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