

# Integrating Evidence Into Health Policy: Navigating Cross-sectoral and Interdisciplinary Collaboration

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## Introduction

While there is substantial demand for systematic and evidence-based public health policy,<sup>1,2</sup> the process of translating public health research into policy remains underdeveloped. Using evidence to inform public health decision-making has been proven effective,<sup>3,4</sup> but the current body of literature lacks detail about the role of research in actual legislative processes.<sup>2,5</sup>

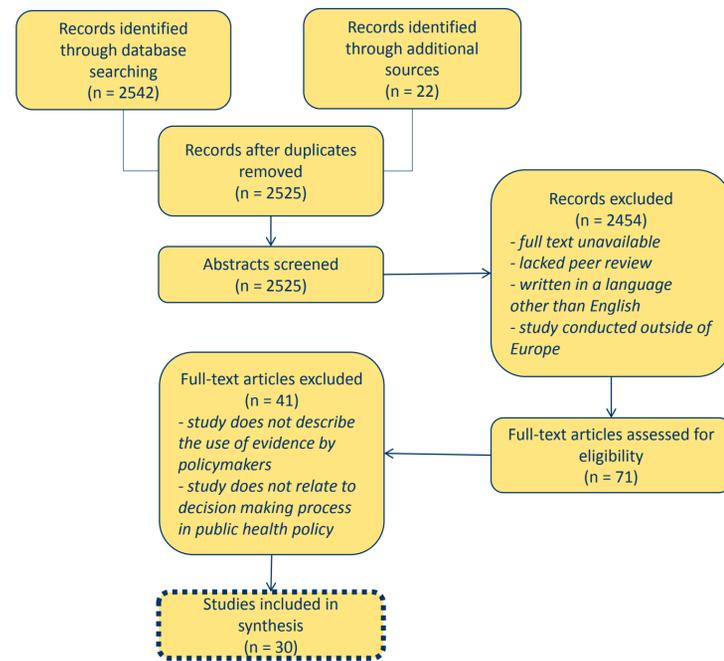


**This systematic review assesses the extent to which evidence is used in European public health decision-making practice, along with highlighting barriers and facilitators to developing and implementing evidence-based policy.**

## Methods

Two reviewers used terms including *evidence-based*, *public health*, *polymaking*, and *Europe* to search for articles across seven databases:

- PubMed
- Scopus
- Cochrane Library
- Science Direct
- Web of Science
- ClinicalKey
- Health and Safety Science Abstract
- General Internet Search



## Results

### Study participants

Of the 30 studies examined in this review, the majority (n=17) reported analysis based on **interviews** and **surveys** which gathered input from diverse perspectives, including:



### Sources of Evidence

One-third of studies (n=10) discussed the widely varying interpretations of the definition of evidence as a complicating factor in the examination of evidence integration in health policy. In addition to illustrating fundamental differences between the professions of policy research and policymaking, this lack of consensus can hinder collaboration by generating tension. Study participants reported a range of sources used as evidence to inform policy, including:



### Limitations

#### Generalizability

The results of this review are specific to the public health practices and political climates of countries in Europe, and cannot be generalized to settings outside of Europe.

#### Exclusion criteria

The search methodology and parameters of exclusion in this study may have affected the results and conclusions of this review.

### Factors that Facilitate Evidence-based Policy

#### Access\*

Awareness of and access to research **unrestricted** by fees or subscription requirements



#### Availability and Applicability\*

The existence of **relevant, clear, and readily applicable** evidence in the body of literature



#### Interdisciplinary Collaboration\*

Professional networks that enable contact and communication between policymakers and researchers



#### Political Alignment

Research is valued as a strategy to lend legitimacy to a predetermined agenda



\*The absence of this facilitator was also reported as a barrier

### Barriers to Generating Evidence-based Policy

#### Low Priority



A lack of motivation stemmed from perceptions that evidence is **useless and irrelevant** to policy decisions

#### Limited Resources



Along with financial constraints, time is limited by terms of political office

#### Low Efficacy



A lack of skills and familiarity with research makes interpreting manuscripts difficult and the process of identifying evidence overwhelming

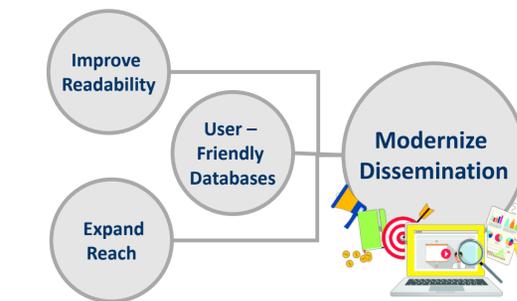
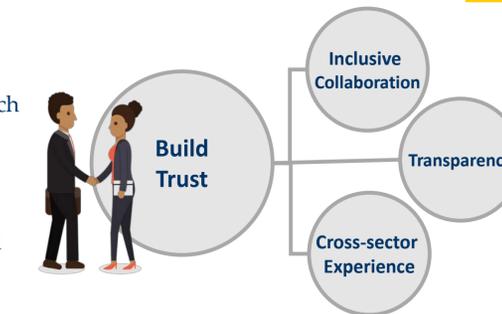
#### Unfamiliar Domain

Policymakers are wary of bias in research and skeptical of the motives of researchers



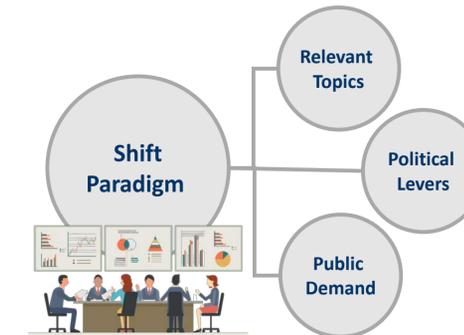
## Implications

Researchers can build relationships with policymakers by including stakeholders throughout the research process, securing funding from nonpartisan sources, publicly releasing outcomes, and gaining experience in politics to better understand application context and advance research literacy.



Researchers can increase the viability of evidence-based policy by streamlining reports for general audiences, publicizing findings outside academic circles, and storing research in databases that are publicly accessible and searchable.

Research organizations can dedicate resources to investigating pertinent topics and repositioning negative perceptions about evidence. Existing influencers, such as political pressure (e.g. campaign donors, lobbies, advocacy groups, established parties) can be harnessed to amplify demand for policies based in evidence.



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## Topics for Further Investigation

- Document Processes**
  - Document logistical details and strategies used in policy-research collaborations to develop best practices
- Explore Systems**
  - Explore system-level functions for potential interventions (e.g. formalize interdisciplinary policy development)
- Demonstrate Value**
  - Establish and publicize relationship between evidence-based public health policy and positive outcomes