

CHiAPRT
Centre for Health in All Policies
Research Translation

AUGUST 2021

A WORKING PAPER ON
WORKING TOGETHER
IN THE WELLBEING ECONOMY

**SURVEY OF RESEARCHERS AND
POLICY ACTORS**

The Centre for Health in All Policies
Research Translation
(CHiAPRT)
Creating Collaborative Impact

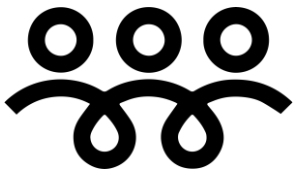


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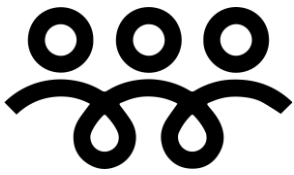
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The Working Together in the Wellbeing Economy: Survey of researchers and policy actors has been undertaken by the Centre for Health in All Policies Research Translation, Health Translation SA in partnership with The Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise, Business School University of South Australia.

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The Project team has been supported by a cross discipline and sector working group with representatives from the research and public policy communities. The Working Group provided strategic and technical guidance on the development of the Survey design, distribution and analysis. The Project team acknowledges the important and valuable contribution provided by the Working Group members. The Project Team would like to make a special mention of the significant technical support provided by Associate Professor Katherine Baldock UniSA.

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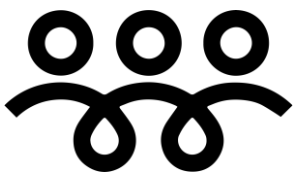
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Technical Expert Panel

The Technical Expert Panel was a small expert group, experienced in healthy and joined up public policy. The Panel provided an 'big ideas' oversight, critical information, and contextualisation to ensure the survey could be adapted to an international context.

- Professor Sharon Friel, Menzies Centre for Health Governance, ANU
- Associate Professor Timo Stahl, Vice Head, Welfare and Health Promotion Unit, National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)
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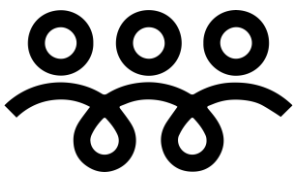
INTRODUCTION

The Centre for Health in All Policies Research Translation (the Centre) based within the Health Translation SA, has been established to work with policymakers and academics at the international and national level to strengthen the capacity for research translation across diverse public policy fields, such as housing, environment, food, social support and the built environment, otherwise known as the underlying determinants of health, wellbeing, and equity.

There are many examples of collaboration between policymakers and researchers, to inform policy and practice, however working together is difficult and the challenges increase when the collaboration requires multidisciplinary teams from both the research community and the public sector. For example, studies have found that it takes an estimated 17 years for research findings to be translated into their intended settings.¹ Many studies never go beyond publication and of those that do, widespread and systematic implementation of findings is seldom achieved. This consistent failure to implement evidence into practice not only represents a missed opportunity to improve outcomes but also results in significant resource burden for the government and society as a whole. Uncovering ways to close this quality chasm is fundamental if public policy outcomes are to be improved.

The Centre works with policymakers, practitioners, researchers, and academics to highlight partnership lessons and experiences, then develop capacity building strategies and tools that strengthen the development of collaborative relationships between the academic community and policy makers, in ways that support the translation of research into policy and practice.

In brief, the activities of the Centre are directed towards understanding and articulating how multisectoral and joined up system approaches work. It draws on the academic capacity of the research community and works with policymakers to strengthen existing knowledge then share those lessons with the wider research and government sectors at local, national, and global level.



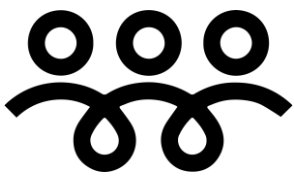
To improve our knowledge of research – policy collaborations the Centre, in partnership with the University of South Australia Business School and Health Science School, undertook a survey of researchers and policy actors, to better understand their experiences of working together. This report summarises the survey objectives, findings, and implications.

BACKGROUND

Society is confronted by significant and diverse complex problems ranging from climate change, growing inequity, and emerging infectious diseases to name a few. These problems require responses that are underpinned by policy-relevant research and evidence and that are strategically feasible - which means the solutions are cognisant of the political context and can be positioned to be delivered working through the bureaucratic policy environment.

Collaboration between policy makers and researchers is essential if these complex problems are to be addressed well. Research evidence helps to identify the nature of the problem, suggests potential solutions, guides policy implementation and can support evaluative judgements about the impact of a policy response. However, collaboration between policy makers and researchers is fraught, as there are a number of political, institutional and ideological issues that impact on their interactions. This can create obstacles and hurdles that must be overcome if the policy making process is to benefit from the use of timely and practice relevant research.

The research and policy making communities operate under different institutional, political, and ideological contexts, leading to the creation of two separate systems that function with limited interaction. Essentially the institutional and political drivers are so different that both systems, the academic research system and the bureaucratic policy making system, can operate independently and in parallel without proper exchange of ideas, knowledge, or perspectives. The gap between the two systems needs to be bridged for improved community outcomes.



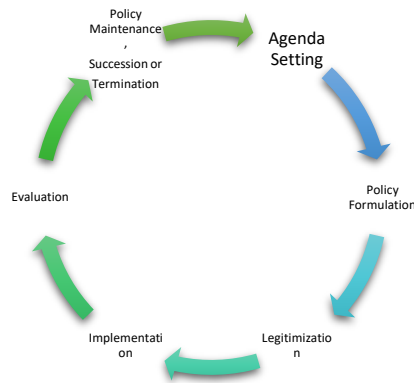
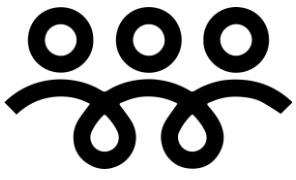
The Australian Government has recognised the importance of translating research into policy and practice. For example, in 2018 Australian Research Council conducted the first Engagement and Impact Assessment project. This project assessed how well universities were translating their research into economic, environmental, social, and cultural benefits, among other things. The aim of the Engagement and Impact Assessment 2018 project is to encourage greater collaboration between universities and research end-users, such as governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations, communities, and community organisations.²

The methodical and transparent access to and utilisation of research evidence by policy makers is known by many terms, including ‘evidence-based decision making’, ‘evidence-informed policy-making’ and ‘research to policy/ practice translation’.³ All of these terms acknowledge that the policy making process is influenced by several factors and that research and evidence are only part of the information used to determine the final policy response.³

WHAT IS POLICY MAKING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Policymaking is defined as “the process by which governments translate their political vision into programs, services and actions, through the allocation of resources and funding, in order to deliver public policy outcomes on the ground and in communities.”⁴

Policy making is often depicted as an orderly and cyclical process, that starts with identification of a problem and flows through to the evaluation of the applied solution – usually a program, service, or structural change. The policy cycle involves multiple stages.⁵



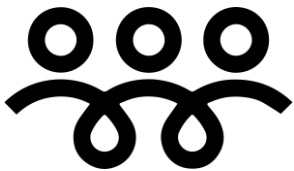
Even though the steps in policy cycle appear simple, the reality involves constant negotiations between policy makers and other actors involved. The ability of researchers to engage with the policy making process and of policy makers to proactively involve researchers throughout the cycle, is crucial. It is through the policy making process that research and evidence can be used to shape and influence decision making and ultimately inform the final policy outcome.

WHY IS EVIDENCE IMPORTANT FOR POLICY MAKING?

Use of evidence exposes policymakers to a broader spectrum of established ideas and perspectives, giving them a variety of policy choices and the confidence to make decisions based on sound technical foundations.⁴ Moreover, evidence plays a key role in the crucial steps of policy cycle, including agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation.⁶

As Stated by the European Commission “Ultimately, any government, at any stage, is measured by its policy decisions and consequences, which puts a high premium on improving decision making as a mechanism, in order to try to produce the desired results,”⁵

Furthermore, there is a high probability that an evidence-based policy which is well-informed, will be more efficient, and cost-effective, compared to traditional policy formulation methods which are bound by time and political processes, and tend to lack an evidence input.⁶



A SURVEY OF RESEARCHERS AND POLICY MAKERS

THE PROBLEM

There are many examples of great collaboration between policymakers and the research community. However, they are often the exception rather than the norm.

The ongoing global crisis of COVID-19 has highlighted the value of research and evidence in decision making, and the policy making process for politicians, practitioners and the community. The knowledge and understanding of research and its uptake has increased in the world of policy making, however, the extent to which an evidence base can help improve policies is yet to reach its full potential.⁷

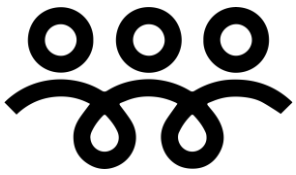
THE SURVEY

To help fill understanding of the research - policy gap, a survey was undertaken which explored the attitudes and experiences of collaboration within and across the research community and policy making community (government and NGO sectors). The survey sought to gain insight into the key challenges and opportunities facing the sectors when collaborating, and to assist with the development of a range of solutions designed to build capacity and support system reform.

The survey captured the different perspectives of the research community, and the policy making community on the nature of collaboration and explored their views on both the opportunities and challenges of trying work across academic disciplines, and government, non-government sectors.

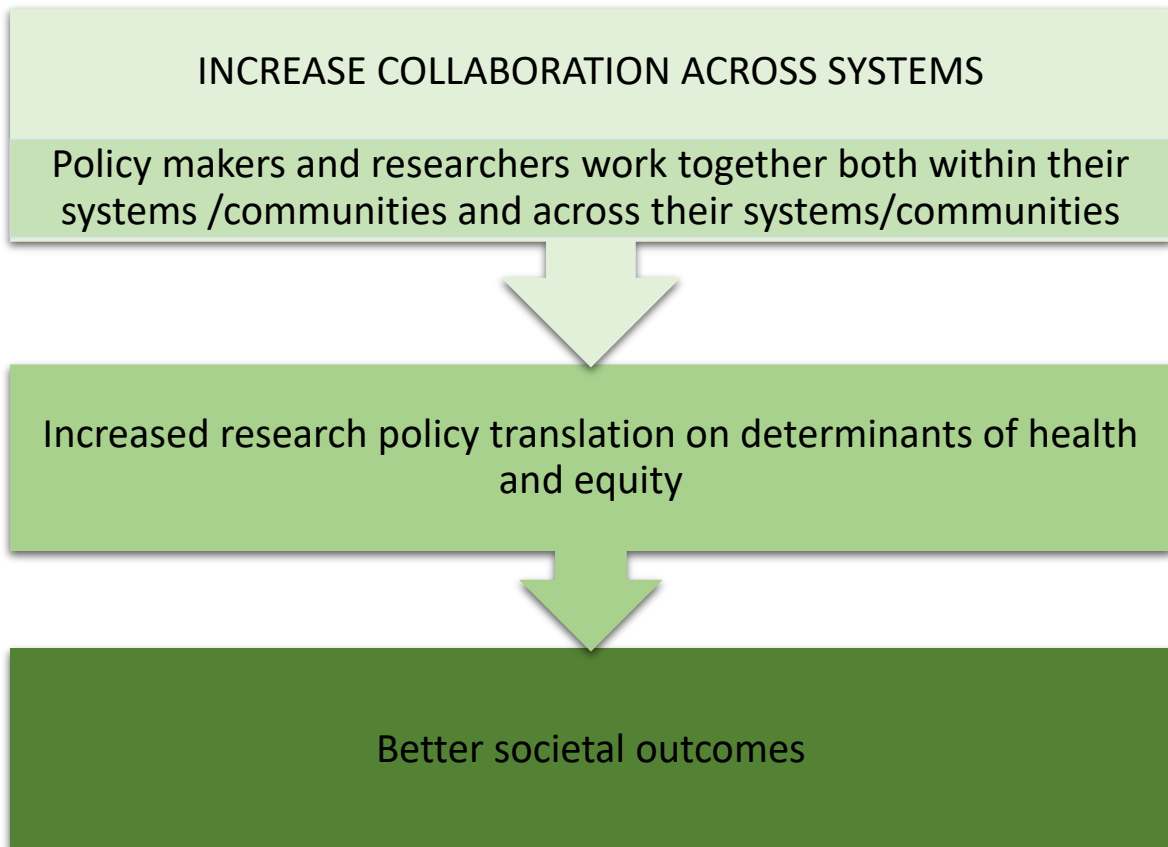
RESEARCH SURVEY QUESTIONS

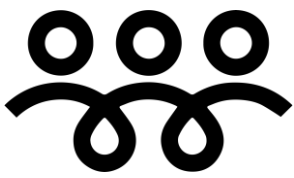
- What do researchers report as the impediments and enablers when working with policy actors to inform policy?
- What do policy actors report as the impediments and enablers when working with researchers to inform policy?



OBJECTIVES

- To create and trial a nationally relevant survey instrument that captures the attitudes, skills, and experiences of collaboration within and across the research and policy making communities.
- To use the insights from the findings to inform the curriculum development of a Master Class for the research and policy making communities.
- To foster collaborative relationships with a small group of academics (researchers?) and policy makers through the working group
- To explore the relevance of the survey project for the international community





SURVEY METHOD

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

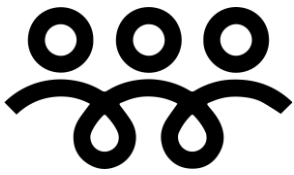
The survey was co-designed by a small working group which included people working in both the research and policy making fields across Australian jurisdictions. The Working Group was established to ensure the diverse perspectives of the research and the policy making communities were incorporated into the research methods and the design of the survey instrument. A Technical Expert Advisory Panel with expertise in joined up public policy approaches and which included international and Australian perspectives was convened to provide high level oversight and ensure relevance to international audiences. Importantly, cultural advice was sought to review the survey instrument was inclusive of researchers and policy makers from an Aboriginal cultural background.

The Survey instruments drew upon previous surveys exploring collaboration, specifically across the public sector and levels of government. While these surveys were informative, the working group and technical expert panel provided key insights to realign the survey to suit a research audience as a well as a policy making audience. Two nearly identical survey instruments were drafted, to enable subtle changes to be accommodated. For example, the question on industry sector or research area were tailored to use the existing Australian Bureau of Statistics descriptors. Ie one for the research/ university sector and one the government / NGO sector.

Ethics approval was provided by the Uni SA Business School and the survey was delivered using Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) Software.

SAMPLING METHOD

The survey sample contact list was non-randomized and created using existing contacts of researchers/academics and policy actors made available by the working group members. In addition, snowballing technique was used to promote the survey by requesting the contact lists to further circulate the survey among their peers.



The following strategies were used to construct the sample:

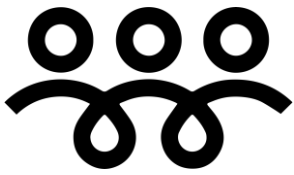
- Contacts and networks of the Survey Working Group Members
- Key policy contacts in each State and Territory shared contact lists of policy officers and/ or local researchers
- Two key contact people - who acted as distribution nodes for the survey were identified in each state and territory: 1- for policy actors and 1- for researchers
- Publicised the survey through key professional newsletters

STRENGTHS

This is the first survey in Australia to capture the barriers and facilitators experienced by both academics/researchers and policy actors when trying to collaborate and work together. In addition, it also captures the views of researchers on what they think are the barriers faced by policy actors, and vice-versa.

LIMITATIONS

As a snowballing technique was used for survey distribution, the reach of the survey cannot be determined, and therefore we do not have an estimate of the base number of participants who were exposed to the survey.



SURVEY RESULTS

SURVEY FINDING DEMOGRAPHICS

This report provides a limited summary of the survey findings, as more detailed analysis of the findings will be shared through peer reviewed journals and academic publications

The survey was opened on April 14th and remained open till the 10th of June 2021. The response to the survey was quite positive with n=172 survey responses submitted and of these n=156 surveys were complete with all questions answered. The responses were observed to be fairly split between researchers/academics and policy actors and included participants from all the states in Australia (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of survey respondents

| | n (%) |
|---------------------|------------|
| Role | |
| Policy Actor | 99 (57.6%) |
| Researcher/Academic | 71 (41.3%) |
| Not stated | 2 (1.2%) |
| State | |
| ACT | 3 (1.7%) |
| NSW | 18 (10.5%) |
| NT | 8 (4.7%) |
| Qld | 18 (10.5%) |
| SA | 65 (37.8%) |
| Tas | 20 (11.6%) |
| Vic | 22 (12.8%) |
| WA | 10 (5.8%) |
| Not stated | 8 (4.7%) |

Researchers were predominantly employed within universities or academic institutes (62%).

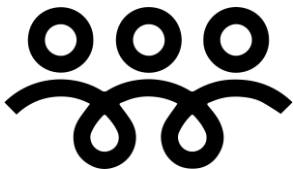


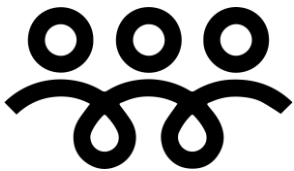
Table 2. Descriptive characteristics of Researchers/Academics (n=71)

| | n (%) |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| Current employer | |
| Government organisation | 7 (9.9%) |
| Non-government organisation | 19 (26.8%) |
| University / Academic Institute | 44 (62.0%) |
| Not stated | 1 (1.4%) |
| Field of work | |
| Built Environment and Design | 3 (4.2%) |
| Economics | 1 (1.4%) |
| Health Sciences | 37 (52.1%) |
| Human Society | 18 (25.4%) |
| Indigenous Studies | 3 (4.2%) |
| Law and Legal Studies | 3 (4.2%) |
| Psychology | 3 (4.2%) |
| Not stated | 3 (4.2%) |
| Career stage | |
| Early (0-5 years) | 18 (25.4%) |
| Mid (6-10 years) | 16 (22.5%) |
| Established (11-15 years) | 13 (18.3%) |
| Well-established (>15 years) | 21 (29.6%) |
| Not stated | 3 (4.2%) |

Policy actors were predominantly employed within State government organisations (63%) and working in the Health Care and Social Assistance (37%) or ‘other’ (21%) fields (Table 3). Respondents most commonly reported being policy, planning or project officers (39%), and more than half had worked in their current department or agency for up to 10 years (52%).

Table 3. Descriptive characteristics of Policy Actors (n=99)

| | n (%) |
|--|------------|
| Current employer | |
| Local government | 7 (7.0%) |
| State government | 62 (62.6%) |
| Non-government organisation | 26 (26.3%) |
| Not stated | 4 (4.0%) |
| Field of work | |
| Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing | 1 (1.0%) |
| Manufacturing | 1 (1.0%) |
| Transport Postal and Warehousing | 1 (1.0%) |
| Professional, Scientific and Technical Services | 6 (6.1%) |
| Administrative and Support Services | 1 (1.0%) |
| Public Administration and Safety | 13 (13.1%) |
| Education and Training | 6 (6.1%) |
| Health Care and Social Assistance | 37 (37.4%) |
| Arts and Recreation Services | 1 (1.0%) |
| Other Service (please specify) | 21 (21.2%) |
| Not stated | 11 (11.1%) |
| Current position | |
| Executive level / Senior Management | 21 (21.2%) |
| Middle Management (Manager/Senior officer responsible for staff) | 24 (24.2%) |
| Policy / Planning / Project Officer | 39 (39.4%) |
| Other (please specify) | 4 (4.0%) |
| Not stated | 11 (11.1%) |
| How long have you worked in your department/agency? | |
| 0-5 years | 41 (41.4%) |
| 6-10 years | 11 (11.1%) |
| 11-15 years | 18 (18.2%) |
| More than 15 years | 18 (18.2%) |
| Not stated | 11 (11.1%) |



POLICY ACTORS AND RESEARCHERS WORKING TOGETHER

Of the n=90 policy actors who completed the survey, 90% reported having worked with academics/researchers to inform the policy making process, and 94% of n=66 researchers reported having ever worked with policy actors to inform the policy making process.

Around half of policy actors responded that they had engaged with researchers either often or very often and that they were the ones to initiate the engagement. Whereas almost three-quarters (72.5%) of researchers indicated they were sometimes or often the one to initiate engagement with policy actors. For both policy actors and researchers' engagement was most often (31.4%) initiated through existing networks.

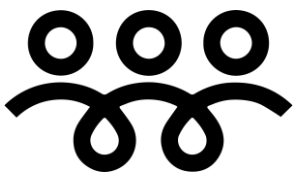
FREQUENCY OF ENGAGEMENT AT PHASES OF POLICY CYCLE

Policy actors reported engaging with researchers typically *once a year or less* often up to a *couple of times a year* across all phases of the policy making cycle, but most frequently at the evaluation phase (47.9%). Researchers reported similar engagement patterns with policy actors, however most commonly reported engagement at the policy formation phase (41.6%). Interestingly, policy actors equally considered the agenda setting (38.4%) and policy formation (38.4%) phases the optimal phases for engaging researchers, whereas the majority of researchers (74.1%) considered the agenda setting phase as optimal for engaging with policy actors.

BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION

Barriers to the use of evidence in policy making most frequently cited in the literature include limited time, demanding workloads, limited capacity for searching and applying evidence; limited knowledge management skills; limited access to research evidence or knowledge management and infrastructure; competing priorities and emerging crises (e.g. public health emergencies).^{8,9,10}

The greatest barrier to engaging with researchers, cited by 25% of policy actors, was budget constraints (i.e., funding not allocated to support researcher involvement). For researchers,



a variety of barriers were cited with relatively equal frequency; however, the equal greatest barriers to engaging with policy actors, each reported by 15% of researchers, were structural (i.e., government and academic institutions working in silos) and political (i.e., risk of research findings being politically unpalatable).

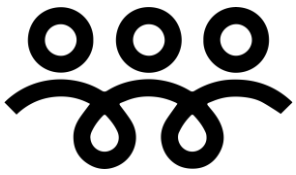
DISCUSSION

The Survey findings reinforce the literature that collaboration is desired by researchers and policy actors but is also difficult and that there are multiple barriers to working together. The survey findings demonstrate that both policy actors and researchers acknowledged the value of having evidence influence and inform the policy making process across each phase of the policy cycle. Furthermore, both researchers and policy actors see the agenda setting and policy formulation stage as the most critical phase where the use of evidence as part of the policy making process can prove the most valuable.

A range of barriers impede the collaboration between researchers and policy actors, and the survey points to strategies that can guide action to help overcome these barriers. A recent review found over 1900 **research-policy engagement initiatives** conducted by over 400 organisations world-wide, but only 3% with publicly-available evaluations, and few drew on existing evidence and theory.¹¹

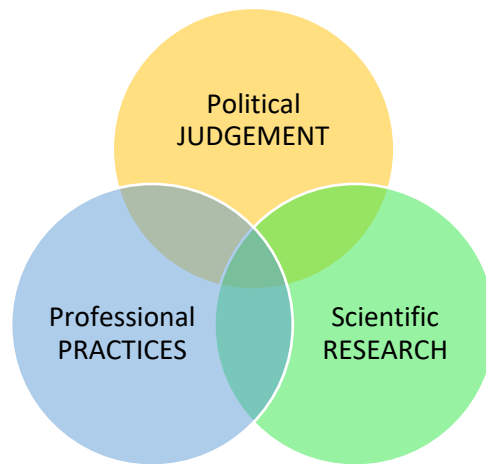
Attention needs to be focused towards building interpersonal or inter-organisational relationships, which are increasingly being explored as a means to support the co-production and use of relevant evidence. However, these approaches need to be underpinned by long-term strategic and institutional support. Working to establish well-structured and resourced research/ policy networks and communities of practice may prove a useful strategy to help policy actors and researchers to expand their known contacts and help open-up opportunities for collaboration and research policy partnerships.

Increasing the familiarity of researchers and policymakers with the policy making process and especially the key decision points and the types of information that may influence these decision points will be valuable for both researchers and policy actors. Informing policy decision making with the best available research evidence is a complex process, recognising



that different of types of information such as politics, habits and traditions, pragmatics, resources, values and ethics, are coming together with research evidence.⁸ It has been proposed that the types of knowledge required can be summarised into three forms including political know-how, scientific and technical analysis, and practice/professional field experience.¹²

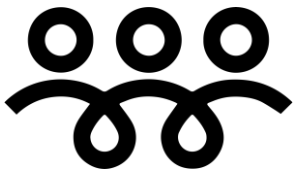
Head refers to these as the three lenses of knowledge and each play a significance role in the policy making, and shape and influence policy in different ways.¹²



Although evidence available for the purpose of policy analysis keeps growing, the issue of research utilisation by decision makers seems to remain a challenge as the policy making process involves different multiple political drivers.¹³ Policy making is undoubtedly a complicated process.¹⁴ Likewise, academics/researchers face significant legal, personal, and practical dilemmas in deciding if, when, and how to participate in the policy cycle.¹⁵

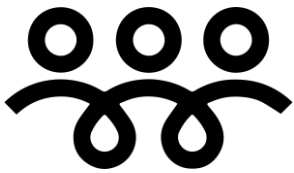
Despite these dilemma's, there is a growing recognition and need for the policy making community and research community to work together to foster strong collaborative, multisectoral, evidence informed responses. Therefore, addressing the impediments and enablers confronted by the two communities will improve future collaborations and eventually help in addressing complex public policy challenges.

The process of facilitating the use of evidence into the policy making process is multifaceted and complex. It is therefore important for researchers to understand this process in order to



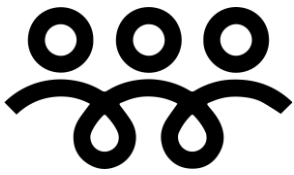
influence it more effectively. Similarly, policy actors need to understand the complexities of the scientific process to improve their interaction with the scientific sphere.

Long-term strategic approaches that work to recognise and strengthen the alignment between the organisational goals of both the research and policy making communities and to support the creation of mechanisms that foster collaborative relationships and ways of working such as co-design and co-production, offer the most promise for promoting research-policy translation. ^{11, 16}



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