The demand for useful evidence for health policy making: a response from WHO Regional Office for Europe

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Overview

Why WHO Regional Office for Europe?

Health Evidence Network
Challenge: evidence for policy making processes

- WHO/Europe works directly with policy makers in 52 Member States
- Increased interest in “evidence-based policy making”
- Information overload, for virtually any decision
WHO/Europe’s aim

To support health decision-making in countries by providing information, knowledge and policy options based on the best available evidence

Definition of evidence

- findings from research whenever possible
- also other knowledge that may serve as a useful basis for decision making in public health and health care
Different views of what constitutes evidence

Producers’ criteria: evidence that is rigorous, comprehensive and can be generalized

Users’ criteria: information that is relevant, specific, concise and easy to understand
Health Evidence Network

HEN bridges the gap between producers and users of evidence

• answers questions from policy-makers

• provides easy access to a range of information and evidence
HEN has four means to achieve its aims

- HEN reports synthesising the best available evidence
- Summaries of existing reports
- Brief responses to questions coming from the HEN email box
- Easy access to selected policy-relevant documents and databases on the web
Policy-makers’ questions are HEN’s starting point

- Policy-makers’ question
- Synthesis of evidence
- 10-page report & 1-page summary
Grading of evidence and strength of policy options

- **Strong evidence** – consistent findings in two or several scientific studies of high quality

- **Moderate evidence** – consistent findings in two or several scientific studies of acceptable quality

- **Limited evidence** – only one study available or inconsistent findings in several studies

- **No evidence** – no study of acceptable scientific quality available
Standard structure for reports

The report

- Introduction
- Findings from research
- Other knowledge
- Current debate
- Discussion
- Conclusions

The summary

- Issue
- Findings
- Policy considerations
Examples of questions

- What is the efficacy/effectiveness of antenatal care?
- What are the main risk factors for disability in old age and how can disability be prevented?
- Which are the most effective and cost-effective interventions for tobacco control?
- Should mass screening for prostate cancer be introduced at the national level?
HEN leverages the knowledge of organizations in the Region

Members of the HEN network include:

- 35 governmental agencies and other public institutions in the field of public health and health care
- The European Commission
- All UN agencies with a mandate in health
Feedback from users

- 40 responses published, 50 in the pipeline, 120 questions received
- A ten-fold increase in the number of visits to the HEN web site in the last year
- Increasing demand from Member States: questions, translation rights
- Interest from other parts of the world (the Americas, and the South-east Asia regions)
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