



Leadership for Public Health Research, Innovation and Applied Evidence

Definitions to be used by the Commission's Short-life Working and Wider Stakeholder Groups



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Background

The Leadership for Public Health Research, Innovation and Applied Evidence Commission requires – as part of its first deliverable – an indication of the definitions to be used by the Commission’s Short-life Working and Wider Stakeholder Groups. In seeking to establish such definitions, the Commission’s Short-life Working (SLWG) agreed that the Commission should adopt those definitions that were already in existence that can help clarify its scope and remit. The SLWG also noted that it should also ensure that any definition adopted is consistent with the underlying values of the Public Health Reform Programme.

Deliverable 1 requires that three definitions of what will be considered within the context of “research”, “innovation”, and “applied evidence” are proposed. In this document, the proposed definition is presented alongside comments on its source and rationale for inclusion. Finally a number of specific clarifications on scope that have already been identified are outlined.

Research

- **Definition**

“Health of the public research is transdisciplinary: it works across traditional discipline boundaries, integrating aspects of natural, social and health sciences, as well as the arts and humanities, which directly or indirectly influence the health of the public.”

In this context the term ‘transdisciplinary’ is taken to mean that it is:

“A ‘holistic’ approach; integrates the natural, social and health sciences in a humanities context, working across traditional discipline boundaries.”

- **Source & Rationale**

This definition has been taken from the 2016 Academy of Medical Sciences report [‘Improving the Health of the Public 2040’](#). It was selected as it is a widely recognised UK-wide definition, from an authoritative body, that is inclusive in its scope of what research can and should underpin the new public health system in Scotland. This breadth of scope also complements the vision for evidence and knowledge application set out in the recent Scottish Government [Digital Health and Care Strategy](#).

It has the added benefit of being able to accommodate more specific definitions of research undertaken in support of public or population health activities (such as the [STEPS](#) definition), as well as those which focus on [ecological public health](#) or [planetary health](#).

Innovation

- **Definition**

“Innovation is the invention, development, production and use of approaches, ideas, interventions, technologies, and supporting services which create solutions and major improvements to public health practice and delivery for health and care.”

- **Source and Rationale**

This definition has been adapted from the definition used by the [Scottish Health Innovations Ltd](#). This is because there is no generally accepted definition of innovation in Public Health.

The UK National Horizon Scanning Centre sponsored research that provided a definition that could be used to identify innovation in public health interventions ([Fung et al, 2011](#)). This research did however conclude that innovation in public health had a close relationship to broader approaches to health technology assessment and innovation.

Applied Evidence

- **Definition**

Applied evidence for Public Health is:

“An iterative sequence of activities and support which together bridge the gap between knowledge and practice, by converting knowledge into decisions and actions to deliver safer, more effective practice and delivery.”

- **Source and Rationale**

The definition is adapted from the definition of [Knowledge into Action](#) used within NHS Education Scotland’s Knowledge network. In this regard it provides an effective link to the elements of the Digital Health and Care Strategy for Scotland that is concerned with effective knowledge mobilisation.

As with Innovation, there is no universally agreed definition of applied evidence in Public Health. Within the public health literatures two competing themes are clear: that of ‘evidence based public health’; and of ‘translational public health’.

Evidence based public health has been most recent defined by [Brownson et al](#) (2017) as.

“The development, implementation, and evaluation of effective programs and policies in public health through application of principles of scientific reasoning, including systematic uses of data and information systems, and appropriate use of behavioral science theory and program planning models.”

Whilst a working definition of translational public health can be derived from the work of [Ogilvie et al](#) (2009) who described a framework in which:

“All types of public health evidence, 'from epidemiology to evaluation', may contribute to the shaping of policy, practice and future research, particularly when combined using thoughtful approaches to evidence synthesis... It is not simply a matter of applying what we already know; the 'basic sciences' of public health still have much to contribute throughout the framework. At the same time, rigorous evaluative and implementation research is increasingly required and should not be regarded as inferior to the more traditional public health sciences.”

Overall, the definition adopted was felt to be more useful as it was felt to capture the essence of both evidence based public health and translational public health approaches in a manner more in keeping with the inclusive definition of public health research proposed.

Scoping Issues

The SLWT have so far identified two specific scoping issues that required clarification. These are:

1. The relationship between research, innovation, applied evidence and surveillance

For the purposes of the Commission, it was agreed that surveillance as a part of public health practice was most properly covered within the context of the Data and Intelligence Commission. Clearly, there will be circumstances where surveillance systems may be used for research purposes, or where innovation in data science may improve population health surveillance, or where surveillance evidence is used to support public health intervention; however, surveillance of itself is out of scope of the Commission.

2. The role of Research, Information and Knowledge Governance

In meeting the requirements of the Commission it will be necessary to consider aspects of governance relating to research, information and knowledge/evidence. The SLWT

explored this and agreed that it was only appropriate to consider these governance issues in the context of how Public Health Scotland would operate as an organisation of itself, or in collaboration with other organisations.

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