

Guiding Principles for Program Evaluation in Ontario Health Units

The Guiding Principles for Program Evaluation in Ontario Health Units provide a framework for strengthening the evaluation of public health programs. The Principles outline when, how and why evaluations should be conducted and who should be involved. Evaluation activities in Ontario health units should be based on the ideals represented in the Principles.

Definitions

A **principle** is defined as a general law which guides action.

A **program** is defined as a series of activities supported by a group of resources intended to achieve specific outcomes among particular target groups.

Program evaluation is the systematic collection, analysis and reporting of data about a program to assist in decision-making.

Stakeholders are individuals and groups (both internal and external) who have an interest in the evaluation; that is, they are involved in or affected by the evaluation. Stakeholders may include program staff or volunteers, program participants, other community members, decision-makers and funding agencies.

Guiding Principles

WHEN

Integrated Program Planning and Evaluation

- Evaluation should be an integral part of program management and should occur during all phases of a program.
- All program plans should include how and when programs will be evaluated.

HOW

Clear Description of the Program

- The program being evaluated should be clearly described — especially activities, outcomes and intended target groups. Program logic models should be used when appropriate.
- Program objectives that are not specific should be clarified before continuing with further evaluation activity.

Explicit Purpose for Identified Need

- The purpose of any evaluation should be explicit and based on identified decision-making needs.

Specific Evaluation Questions

- Evaluation questions should be specific and clear.
- Evaluation questions should be based on the need to answer key management questions.
- The developmental stage of a program, its complexity and the reason for the evaluation should be considered in formulating evaluation questions.
- Evaluation questions directly reflect a program's activities, intended target groups and outcomes.

Ethical Conduct

- Members of the evaluation team should consider the ethical implications of program evaluation to ensure the rights of participants in the evaluation are respected and protected.

Systematic Methods

- The evaluation questions should determine the evaluation methods.
- A review of the literature and a scan of evaluation activity in relevant program areas in other health units should be carried out at the outset.
- New data should not be collected if existing information can adequately answer evaluation questions.
- The most rigorous evaluation methods should be used given time and resource limitations.
- Evaluation should incorporate data (quantitative or qualitative or both) gathered from a variety of sources with varying perspectives.

Clear and Accurate Reporting

- Evaluation reports should include a description of the program and its context, the purpose of the evaluation, data sources, methods of data analysis, findings and limitations.
- Evaluation reports should be presented in a clear, complete, accurate and objective manner.

Timely and Widespread Dissemination

- The dissemination of evaluation findings to stakeholders should be timely.
- Evaluation findings should be shared with other Ontario health units when appropriate.

WHO

Multidisciplinary Team Approach

- The evaluation team should include a variety of people who have adequate knowledge of the program, its participants and program evaluation.
- Responsibilities should be agreed upon at the beginning of the evaluation. One person should be responsible for the overall management of the evaluation.
- The evaluation team should seek technical advice, support and/or training when necessary.
- Members of the evaluation team should continuously work toward improving their program evaluation skills; team members with evaluation expertise should support this learning.

Stakeholder Involvement

- Stakeholders should be consulted and, if appropriate, be directly involved throughout the evaluation process, within time and resource limitations.
- Stakeholders' interests, expectations, priorities and commitment to involvement should be assessed at the outset of the evaluation.
- Communication among stakeholders should be honest and open.
- Evaluation should be sensitive to the social and cultural environment of the program and its stakeholders.

WHY

Use of Evaluation Findings

- Program managers should formulate an action plan in response to evaluation findings.
- Evaluation findings should be used to support decision-making.

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