

# An International Study of Health Research Funding Agencies' Support and Promotion of Knowledge Translation



*Ian Graham, Jacqueline Tetroe, Nicole Robinson, Jeremy Grimshaw, and the International Funders Study Research Group*

# The International Funders Study Research Group

## Investigators

- Ian Graham
- Jeremy Grimshaw
- Martin Eccles
- Lisa Bero
- Pierre Durieux
- Andy Oxman
- Bev Shea
- Jeanette Ward
- Michel Wensing



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## Research Team

- Jacqueline Tetroe
- Nicole Robinson
- Robbie Foy
- Camilla Palmhøj Nielsen
- Armita Adily
- Rémy Chatila
- France Légaré
- Maria Cannataro
- Cassandra Porter
- Louise Zitzelsberger
- Sarah Milne

# Part 1: The Study Objective

- To increase our understanding of the knowledge transfer policies and activities of applied health research funding bodies within Canada and internationally by examining the perceived role of funding agencies in promoting the results of the research they fund.

# Methods

## Study design:

- Qualitative study in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of key informants from applied health funding agencies identified by the collaborators. These were supplemented with information from the agency websites.

## Sample:

- Up to three representatives were interviewed in each of 30 applied health funding agencies in Canada, the United States, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands and Australia.

# Methods

- The transcripts were analyzed in terms of two major categories: agency requirements of the researcher and agency KT initiatives that were broader than an individual funded study.
- We examined agency requirements of the researcher at the time of application, at the end of the study and in terms of allowable expenses for dissemination-related activities.

# Broad categories of analysis

- Policies and activities were categorized as push, pull or linkage and exchange.
  - Push – traditional efforts to disseminate to a broad audience (Lavis, 2003)  
[http://www.healthservicesconference.com.au/presentations/j\\_lavis.pdf](http://www.healthservicesconference.com.au/presentations/j_lavis.pdf)
  - Pull – focused on the needs of users, creating an appetite for research results (Lavis, 2003)
  - Linkage and Exchange – building/maintaining relationships to exchange knowledge and ideas (Lomas, 1999) [www.chsrf.ca/knowledge\\_transfer/pdf/linkage\\_e.pdf](http://www.chsrf.ca/knowledge_transfer/pdf/linkage_e.pdf)

# Results

- Two thirds of the agencies had explicit or implicit reference to KT in their mission/mandate.
- All agencies engaged in some sort of KT activity.
- The majority of agencies consider KT as a shared responsibility between the agency and the researchers.
- Within the 30 agencies studied, 27 different terms used for KT were identified in the transcripts, many of which were not defined.
- The operational definitions of KT varied between agencies.

# KT terms encountered

applied health research,  
capacity building,  
co-optation - cooperation -  
competing,  
Diffusion\*,  
Dissemination\*,  
getting knowledge into practice,  
impact,  
Implementation\*,  
knowledge communication,  
knowledge cycle,  
knowledge exchange,  
knowledge management.  
knowledge translation

knowledge mobilization,  
knowledge transfer  
linkage and exchange  
popularization of research,  
research into practice,  
research mediation,  
research transfer,  
research translation,  
science communication,  
teaching,  
“third mission”,  
translational research,  
transmission,  
utilization

\*cited most frequently

# Agency requirements of researchers

- Divided into three categories:
  - at time of application
  - at end of study
  - allowable expenses
- Most agencies required researchers to state the bottom line of their proposed study, and to submit a final report upon completion of their study
- Few agencies offered help to researchers in completing these requirements
- While  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the agencies require researchers to submit a KT plan at the time of application, less than  $\frac{1}{2}$  require that the researchers define their audience

# Agency Requirements of Researcher: At Time of Application

| <b>N=30 agencies</b>                    | <b>Total<br/>%</b> | <b>Expected<br/>%</b> | <b>Required<br/>%</b> | <b>Required<br/>with help<br/>%</b> |
|---|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Partner with stakeholders</b>        | <b>57%</b>         | <b>27</b>             | <b>20</b>             | <b>10</b>                           |
| <b>State bottom line/relevance</b>      | <b>84%</b>         | <b>7</b>              | <b>77</b>             | <b>0</b>                            |
| <b>Provide lay summary<br/>proposal</b> | <b>66%</b>         | <b>3</b>              | <b>53</b>             | <b>10</b>                           |
| <b>Define KT target audience</b>        | <b>46%</b>         | <b>10</b>             | <b>33</b>             | <b>3</b>                            |
| <b>Provide KT plan</b>                  | <b>73%</b>         | <b>7</b>              | <b>53</b>             | <b>13</b>                           |

# Agency Requirements of Researcher: At End Of Study

| <b>N=30</b>                                    | <b>Total<br/>%</b> | <b>Expected<br/>%</b> | <b>Required<br/>%</b> | <b>Required<br/>with help<br/>%</b> |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Final report</b>                            | <b>84%</b>         | <b>7</b>              | <b>77</b>             | <b>0</b>                            |
| <b>Publish findings</b>                        | <b>87%</b>         | <b>43</b>             | <b>37</b>             | <b>7</b>                            |
| <b>Lay summary results</b>                     | <b>57%</b>         | <b>7</b>              | <b>27</b>             | <b>23</b>                           |
| <b>Report for decision<br/>makers</b>          | <b>27%</b>         | <b>10</b>             | <b>10</b>             | <b>7</b>                            |
| <b>Report on<br/>communications activities</b> | <b>37%</b>         | <b>13</b>             | <b>20</b>             | <b>3</b>                            |
| <b>Attend agency workshops</b>                 | <b>67%</b>         | <b>37</b>             | <b>17</b>             | <b>13</b>                           |

# Agency Requirements of Researcher: Allowable Expenses

| <b>Budget line/allowable expense for:</b>         |            |
|---|------------|
| <b>Dissemination</b>                              | <b>57%</b> |
| <b>Publication</b>                                | <b>60%</b> |
| <b>Web development</b>                            | <b>33%</b> |
| <b>Translation (from one language to another)</b> | <b>33%</b> |
| <b>Workshops</b>                                  | <b>67%</b> |

# Agency initiated activities

- The agency initiated activities were divided into the following broad categories: tools/techniques, services, linkage and funding.
- The most common activities/strategies were the creation of audience tailored web pages, consulting stakeholders in setting the research agenda, funding workshops, creating linkage and exchange opportunities with various parties (such as decision makers, the public, health managers, etc) and helping researchers with plain language writing and communicating with the media.

# Agency Initiatives: Tools/techniques

| <b>N=30 agencies</b>                  | <b>%</b>  |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Audience tailored publications</b> | <b>93</b> |
| <b>Audience tailored web pages</b>    | <b>77</b> |
| <b>Lay summaries on website</b>       | <b>67</b> |
| <b>Use of media</b>                   | <b>83</b> |
| <b>Develops tools</b>                 | <b>30</b> |
| <b>Use of drama</b>                   | <b>20</b> |

# Agency Initiatives: Services

| <b>N=30 agencies</b>   | <b>%</b>  |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Helps researchers with writing, communication with media, etc</b> | <b>77</b> |
| <b>HTA/Policy/Research synthesis</b>                                 | <b>60</b> |
| <b>Fund/organize lectures</b>  | <b>27</b> |
| <b>Funds/assists with commercialization possibilities</b>            | <b>27</b> |

# Agency Initiatives: Linkage

| <b>N=30 agencies</b>                               | <b>%</b>  |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Organize video conferences</b>                  | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Create/fund networks</b>                        | <b>50</b> |
| <b>Linkage and exchange</b>                        | <b>77</b> |
| <b>Meta-linkage</b>                                | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Consult stakeholders to set research agenda</b> | <b>80</b> |
| <b>Programmes for decision makers</b>              | <b>20</b> |

# Agency Initiatives: Funding

| <b>N=30 agencies</b>               | <b>%</b>  |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Fund targeted workshops</b>     | <b>87</b> |
| <b>Produce/fund journals</b>       | <b>40</b> |
| <b>Fund KT RFAs</b>                | <b>40</b> |
| <b>Fund KT centres</b>             | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Fund conference grants</b>      | <b>47</b> |
| <b>Fund teams of investigators</b> | <b>37</b> |
| <b>Fund chairs</b>                 | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Other funding opportunities</b> | <b>30</b> |

# Results

- No single activity was practised by all of the agencies.
- Every agency engaged in push, pull and linkage and exchange to some extent
- The expectations relating to researcher requirements were embedded into the granting process and therefore appeared to be more systematic than initiatives taken by the agency, since there was more room for individual variation and experimentation.

# Conclusions

- This is a time of rapid evolution for agencies in terms of their approaches to and means of increasing the uptake and dissemination of the results of the research they fund.
- A wide range of knowledge transfer activities were reported across the 30 agencies, with large variation in terms of creating a pull for research findings; engaging in linkage and exchange between agencies, researchers and decision makers; and pushing results to various audiences.
- Evaluation of these activities is challenging and agencies are either not ready to embark on a formal evaluation or are doing so on a very preliminary and/or exploratory basis.

# Conclusions

- Funding agencies practice a range of KT strategies, and little is known about the effectiveness of these strategies
- The interviewees viewed this study as a highly relevant exercise due to perceived pressure to decrease the gap between research and practice and for increased accountability

# Policy Implications

- Agencies may benefit from an opportunity to examine what other agencies are doing in this important area.
- Increased emphasis on evaluation will be needed to discern which KT strategies are effective for both agencies and researchers
- Agencies should develop and have regular reviews of their KT policies to ensure consistency and clarity

## Part 2: The Workshop

- Agency representatives were invited to attend a one day workshop in which the investigator team presented the results of our qualitative study.
- Purpose of the workshop was to elicit their interpretation of our findings and discuss their implications.
- Plans for a UK and Australian workshop

# Methods

## Sample:

- Representatives from the following agencies attended the workshop:
  - CHSRF, CIHR, AHFMR, FRSQ, NCIC, AHRQ, NIH-NCI, RWJF, California HealthCare Foundation, Center for Evidence Based Policy, and CDC.
  - Also in attendance were members of the investigator team and Réjean Landry, a Canadian expert in knowledge utilization.

# Morning Workshop

- Agency representatives asked to consider:
  1. How funders should promote and support KT activities by researchers
    - At time of application
    - During the study
    - At end of study
  2. What recommendations would reflect ideal as well as reasonable practices for funders

# Results

Suggested requirements for researchers in the application process and during the conduct of the funded study:

- State relevance of project
- Identify target audience for KT activities
- Provide a lay summary of proposal (for the public and press)
- Provide a KT plan
- Stakeholder involvement where appropriate
- Requirement to alert funder close to end of study about potential results (e.g., so results are not published before funder is informed)

# Results

Suggested requirements for researchers:

- Provide a structured final report that may include:
  - List of publications (this is out of researcher/funder control)
  - Lay summaries of results
  - Report on communication activities
  - Workshops etc.
  - Bio and photo of researcher to go with summary (to put a face to the research, to put a single study into the context of the researcher's body of work)

# Other issues discussed

- Problem of keeping track of what proposals have been funded, which research has been completed, and the results obtained
- Problem of contextualizing research and determining how study results should be prioritized in terms of need for dissemination to various audiences

# Afternoon Workshop

- During the afternoon workshop, we asked agency representatives to consider:
  1. How funders should promote and support their agency's KT activities
    - At time of application
    - During studies
    - At end of study
    - Outside the context of individual studies
  2. What recommendations would reflect ideal as well as reasonable practices for funders

# Issues discussed

- Agency representatives expressed a need for a systematic approach to KT that cuts across all of their programs taking into account:
  - Agency goals
  - Range of programs
  - Desired outcomes
  - How outcomes will be met

# Issues discussed

- Partnerships with sister agencies and the private sector – not just to garner more research money but also to share information
- How to link with policy makers – for example, through providing training programs for policy makers, training fellowships, setting up electronic links between decision makers, fellowships for science writers/ media
- Corporate communications – translating research summaries into plain language, translating research into stories for public consumption, targeted email notification about research, centralized dissemination services
- Knowledge synthesis – commissioning syntheses or reviews
- Creating a research register – archival and active

# Issues discussed

- Coaching/training researchers to communicate with the decision making world; training peer reviewers
- Setting up a speaker's bureau of researchers with good speaking skills and a defined expertise
- Actively changing cultures – e.g., encouraging universities to reward researchers who spend a lot of time on KT
- Funding the science of KT
- Moving from one-off strategies to systematic operationalisation of KT plan

# Summary

- Funding agencies discussed the need to set minimum expectations of researchers to encourage KT and to ensure that there is a scientific record of a project.
- Some of the suggestions included:
  - Preparation of a structured final report
  - Identification of target audiences for KT activities
  - Stakeholder involvement where appropriate.
- The workshop participants agreed that funders need to agree on a common set of terms and operational definitions

# Summary

- There is a need for a set of criteria for deciding what to disseminate, how and to whom and that these would be linked to the knowledge synthesis capability of the agency
- Agencies can take on a training role through various mechanisms
- Agencies can have a pivotal linking role between researchers and research users
- Evaluation of their KT programs is a new area that many agencies find difficult.

# Key Issues

- Funding agencies need to decide what part of the KT agenda they can address internally and which through others (such as universities, knowledge brokers, etc.)
- Work in this area depends on the “K” you are trying to “T” to whom
- Different agencies may see their role differently, depending on their mandate/mission or background in KT
- The amount of dedicated funding for KT in many agencies is minimal.

# Implications for policy

- Funders should consider developing coordinated strategies and processes to effectively manage the issues raised in the workshop.
- There would be value in forming a funders' association to provide a forum for sharing ideas and problems as well as to pool resources to leverage change.

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Thank you