

Policy and Intervention Development for Chronic Disease Prevention: The Role of Surveillance

Conventional (public health) wisdom suggests that health data and information would contribute to improved definition of the extent and distribution of health problems, thereby improving the design and targeting of health policies and interventions. Furthermore, having continuous surveillance would contribute to improved monitoring and evaluation of programs and policies. There are well-known social and technical barriers to making this dream a reality. The problems of availability and timely reporting of relevant data is well understood, as seen in health promotion capacity mapping in countries in the Western Pacific Region, along with the gap that exists between data analysts and decision-makers. A consideration of what policy-makers and program designers want may be helpful for the next stage of development in the information base for chronic disease prevention, as well as for knowledge translation mechanisms. The development of the evaluation framework for the Australian Better Health Initiative points to the range of surveillance systems needed, along with other informational requirements, that relate to the nature of policy questions, the culture of decision-makers, and the mindsets about data and information. The strengthening of the evidential basis for policy and program development is likely to need further consideration about democratisation of surveillance systems, as well as leadership in advocacy.

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