Reviewer's report

Title: Integrating an Ecological Approach into an Aboriginal Community-based Chronic Disease Prevention Program: A Longitudinal Process Evaluation

Version: 1 Date: 16 March 2011

Reviewer: Kim Raine

Reviewer's report:

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
   • Yes, the question and hypotheses are clearly articulated

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described?
   • The methods are sound. Interviews, observations and activity implementation forms are well suited to the target population, and the reach appears extensive.
   • The coding framework had been previously developed and validated. The use of inter-coder reliability is appropriate.
   • Query re: the ecological complexity score: “A score of 0 was given to an organisation that employed only one intervention strategy, independent of setting and type of strategy.” Could you please clarify. I would expect that if only one intervention strategy was applied, but it was at a high level distant to the individual (eg. policy change to promote adequate income) that this single intervention would deserve a higher complexity score, as the implications, although perhaps not explicit, would be important for the individual (eg. adequate income to afford healthier foods). Would such an intervention have been coded as a 0, or would the implications on the individual (HP – POL- IND) be recognized in the coding scheme?

3. Are the data sound?
   • Yes. Please refer to Table 4 early in the results section so that the reader can get a flavour of the types of interventions implemented. (Table 4 may have to become Table 1)

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition?
   • yes

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data?
   • Yes. With respect to the barriers to implementing an ecological approach, do these conclusions arise from data collected or are they derived from the research team’s reflections on the process? If they are reflection, please identify them as such.

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated?
• Yes. Limitations are clearly described

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished?
• Foundations clearly acknowledged

• Query: In Background, Paragraph 2, The example given for “Environment-focused strategies modify one or more aspects of a priority population’s social, political and/or physical environment” is unclear. How does the “development of a school garden to facilitate nutrition education among children” illustrate an environment-focused strategy? Please be explicit.

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found?
• Yes.
• In the abstract, I would recommend the statement “It is the first such study of its kind.” Other studies have attempted to analyze application of ecological models in health promotion, and these have recently been systematically reviewed (see Richard, Gauvin & Raine. Ecological Models Revisited: Their Uses and Evolution in Health Promotion Over Two Decades, Annual Review of Public Health, Review in Advance first posted online on December 21, 2010. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031210-101141

9. Is the writing acceptable?
• Yes. The manuscript is very well written and clear.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests