Reviewer's report

Title: Tools to support evidence-informed public health decision making

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Reviewer: Atle Fretheim

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Peer review report:
Tools to support evidence-informed public health decision making

General comments

The authors have evaluated a knowledge translation and exchange intervention that was implemented over nearly 2 years at three public health departments in Ontario, Canada. From the current manuscript, it seems that the group have prepared at least three reports: one describing the details of the interventional package, one on the impact of the intervention, and the current one where they report on the acceptability and perceived usefulness of the intervention.

How can the research community, and others, best support policymakers in making good use of available research evidence? Many struggle with this question, thus the authors are addressing a topic of interest to many. The current report provides some insights, although the insights are limited by the simplicity of their approach, mainly entailing 37 relatively short, semi-structured interviews.

The main methodological weaknesses that I see with the current manuscript is that it comes across as a “qualitative light”-study. I do not object to the idea of conducting supplementary qualitative research by means of relative simple approaches. But simplicity often entails weaknesses, which need to be acknowledged, discussed, and reported.

All the numbered comments the follow are “compulsory revisions” from my point of view.

1. It is not clear what the role of the researchers are (i.e. “reflexivity” is a key concept in this type of research). Were they the same individuals as the ones who implemented the intervention? Is the Knowledge Broker in the program among the authors? If the answer to these questions are yes, then the authors need to discuss the implications this has on the assessment and interpretation of their findings.

2. The approach for data collection is also not completely clear. Are the 37 interviews the total of before- and after-interviews? For the qualitative analysis I assume only post-intervention interviews are of interest. Also, the interviewees come across as strikingly positive – to the extent that I suspect that some element of social desirability bias may be at play here. These are among the
things the authors need to reflect on.

Methods section

3. Under “Methods” the authors mention several data sources, including Organizational documents, including “strategic plans, internal communications related to EIDM (meeting minutes), policies and procedures related to the sharing and integration of EIDM, existing tools to facilitate the implementation of EIDM, and existing write-ups of literature reviews”, but only two are referred to under results (interviews and the knowledge broker’s notes).

4. How many of the authors were directly involved in the analysis of the data, and how were they involved? Were the coding- and the comparative processes carried out in duplicate, for example?

Results section

5. The extensive description of the various tools under “Results” seems somewhat misplaced. The development of the tools is not mentioned under methods, and the authors write that a separate publication is in preparation where this will be reported on in detail. On the other hand, it is difficult for the reader to understand much of the text without a description of the various tools in question. In fact, for those who are not familiar with the field, many of these tools will be unknown, and it may be hard to understand what they are, in practice – even with the rather lengthy descriptions in the current text. Clicking on the links in additional file 1 is helpful, but is (too) much to ask from an average reader. For example, many may wonder “Are these tools documents? Are they software-packages? Something else?” Perhaps a very brief description of the tools should be included under methods, and an abridged version (if possible) of additional file 1 could be included as a table.

6. What is the thinking behind the use of quotes here?

Discussion section

7. I find it very surprising that the authors detected practically no critical remarks from the individuals involved in this exercise. I simply find that too good to be true. The authors should discuss this.

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.