Reviewer’s report

Title: Setting strategy for system change: Using concept mapping to prioritise national action for chronic disease prevention.

Version: 0 Date: 18 Mar 2017

Reviewer: Sue Mills

Reviewer's report:

General Comments:

This manuscript described a study that uses a concept mapping method to bring together academics, policy makers and practitioners' ideas on how to improve Australia's approach to the prevention of chronic diseases (policy and strategy) to produce 12 domains for action.

Substantive Comments:

The language of the manuscript is very technical in places and needs to be revised to enable those with no expertise in concept mapping to fully understand the study.

The value contribution of the work needs to be strengthened. As reported in the manuscript, there has already been an enormous amount of strategic work done on prevention of chronic diseases in Australia. Hence, the big question is why have those failed and how does this study and findings help to address that gap? This is not clear in the current manuscript. Is it that different fractions have created different ideas about prevention in Australia and this work brings together people that normally have not shared ideas? Or is it all the prior efforts have produced broad general directions or too many competing ideas to enable action at local levels? Or is it that divergent and convergent opinions had never been considered in the same planning process? Or they don't clear priorities and a differentiation between importance and feasibility? ....

Detailed Comments:

Abstract

Needs to include number of individuals who contributed "data" for each phase of study.

Value added comment above needs to come through in conclusion section
Background
Pg 5, lines 36-54

The value added piece of the study needs to be more clearly addressed in relation to current and well defined gaps in this section as noted earlier.

Methods

Concept Mapping
Pg. 6 lines 4-8

Conceptual linkage between concept mapping and system thinking needs to be made. Assumption that all readers will understand term "system thinking"

Pg. 6 lines 9-13

Qualitative approaches are also used after the generation of maps for interpretation processes.

Pg. 6 lines 14-30

Examples should be directly related to study described, if possible. For example, studies that have used concept mapping for primary prevention, to bring together multilevel stakeholders, to address strategy/policy for chronic disease. The current list seems a bit random and unfocused (e.g., study on students developing positive concepts of health).

p.6 concept mapping

It would be useful to summarize the major stages involved in a CM process upfront to help readers make sense of remaining sections in methods (e.g., generating ideas, summarizing and rating them, producing visual maps, interpreting them etc.)

Data Collection
Pg. 7 Lines 20-60 and Pg. 8 lines 1-7

This section was awkward to read with technical language. It may be more useful to talk about the data collection process into steps of what you were trying to achieve rather than more vague language like "structuring". Even though, you define what was involved in the task further on, the language is not reader friendly.

Lines 36-39
Participants could see other participants' answers to the question but were they anonymous or linked in some way to participants' names?

Lines 47-48

Who was on the Project Steering Committee and how as it created?

Pg. 8 Lines 0-7

How/who decided on your rating criteria of importance and feasibility? Was it your participants? Steering Committee? What was the rationale?

Analysis

Pg. 8 Lines 15-44.

This section provides a reasonable summary of concept mapping analysis processes. However, it is not easier for someone with no CM background to understand. Revising it in relation to stating the processes in relation to what you were trying to understand in each step would make it easier to understand.

Lines 42-45

More explanation of go-zone plots required to be of value to reader. Did you create one for each cluster/group? Or one for all the statements?

Interpretation of Concept Maps

pg. 8 lines 56-61

It is not clear who these 20 stakeholders are in relation to rest of study participants. Were some of them in initial brainstorming group or was it a whole new group of individuals etc.?

pg. 8-9

lines 61, 0-3

This interpretation process is very importance as it is one of the qualitative aspects of the analysis. There is an editing mistake in 1 - agreeing to ...For number 2 reivewing the maps to see whether they made intuitive sense in relation to what? Need to tie interpretation back to original question and objectives of study.
Results

pg. 9

lines 9-36

This section was not clear. Summary tables of participant sample (numbers and roles, profession etc.) would be useful. It is hard to quickly make sense of sample size in relation to written text etc. For instance, 78 people participated in brainstorming but 82 began and only 59 finished. Where did the number 78 come from? Need to have a quick and clear understanding of how many participants continued through the entire process and completed each phase. In the discussion participant numbers are finally addressed but that seems way too late in manuscript. Also, the range is 78 to 58 (not 59).

lines 40-53

Description of stress value is very technical and would not make sense to anyone without concept mapping experience. What does "goodness of fit of the map to the sort data" mean in plain language?

Lines 54-59

How were cluster maps examined? By who? How? and what does to "yield interpretable clusters" mean? By who? on what basis?

Figure one is useful but some redesign could put titles in a better place.

Pg. 10

Lines 21-34

What is the general pattern match?

Aligning text with Figure 2 posed some challenges. Some lines seem to be missing and others don't match your descriptions. Perhaps this is a printing issue?

Figure 3, 4 and 5

While the findings of different ratings between groups is interesting these figures are visually complex for someone to quickly make sense of. I am not sure of value added. Text might suffice. Once again the lines do not match up on my printed version.

Discussion
This section situates the findings back in the broader literature, particularly other strategic planning processes and results that are briefly mentioned in background section. As noted in general comments, the value of these findings in relation to what has already been done does not come across strongly in this section as it seems that the results largely reiterate what has been outlined in other policy and planning processes. The two key messages are well known concepts in the field of prevention. You seem to be arguing that the value added piece is that you have importance and feasibility ratings on identified actions and they have been prioritized but it is not clear in a practical sense how this will help Australia move forward in concrete terms on prevention of chronic diseases in comparison to what strategic documents have already attempted to do. At the end of the discussion you identify that more research is needed ("most likely a qualitative group process") to allow for a more in-depth examination across all sectors - which begs the question of why you did not have the broad representation in this study to create new insights on this topic and needed direction if that was one of the gaps in current approaches.

As noted earlier, outlining participation numbers here for the first time is too late in manuscript and would be more helpful for the reader in method or results sections (with decreasing size of sample remaining in this paragraph as a limitation of the study). Also, number of 58 here does not match the 59 stated earlier in manuscript.

Conclusions

This section reads more like a summary of the value of concept mapping methodology rather than an emphasis and summary of the substantive results and their importance for Australia in better addressing the prevention of chronic disease. Needs to be revised to shift emphasis.

Level of interest

Please indicate how interesting you found the manuscript:

An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English

Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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