Reviewer's report

Title: Identifying research priorities for public health research to address health inequalities: use of Delphi-like survey methods

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Reviewer: Francisco Becerra-Posada

Reviewer's report:

Having a research agenda or prioritizing research is key for supporting the generation of evidence for decision making by health officials. Having research oriented towards responding to specific health issues or problems faced on a daily basis or when a policy is to be developed, is even better, as a clear link is established between health services/systems and research.

The authors state at the beginning of the Background that for funding for health is essential to have research questions. The second part of the initial statement and the next phrase are correct as stated above. However, health funding has so many factors around it, that research questions might be to be considered in special programs or interventions, but not for the overall funding of health services.

There is another Research Agenda that used Delphi as a method to develop it. A regional exercise was carried out by the Caribbean Health Research Council (now CARPHA) in 2012. A regional research agenda was prioritized using Delphi method: http://www.chrc-caribbean.org/Portals/0/Downloads/Publications/Research/Cbean%20Health%20Research%20Agenda/Health%20Research%20Agenda%20for%20the%20Caribbean.pdf, thus, your approach is a valid one and has been implemented and used.

In the Methods section, a short intro as to describe Phases and Delphi rounds would benefit the reader, as they are different and key to understand the paper.

I wonder if you provided a definition of "inequalities in the UK" or was it left for interpretation? That definition could have brought different topics to the exercise. Might be useful if the authors could describe this.

The authors do not present an overall response rate from initially contacted persons, which comes down to 26%, still in the limits of positive response for email surveys. Suggest to present (text and Table 1) as response rate by Delphi round and overall response rate. Same in phase 2.
In the Discussion, authors question in the second paragraph "… should they have been involved from the beginning of Phase 1 as to be part of a more integrated exercise? Would that have had a different outcome?" and later on: "This highlights the potential disconnect which has been noted previously between practice and research." The method authors followed, that of separating public health professionals from researchers and ask them in two different stages, perpetuates the separation and conflicts the outcomes. If both groups were involved from the beginning, authors would have contributed to diminish that constant separation of researchers and practitioners. A strong recommendation could be incorporated as to use any available opportunity to do so.

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