Author’s response to reviews

Title: SUSTAINABILITY OF PUBLIC HEALTH INTERVENTIONS: WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

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RESPONSE TO REVIEWERS ON COMMENTARY - HRPS-D-18-00203

REVIEWER ONE: FEEDBACK

As long as this manuscript is not a research paper but more a discussion paper, I think the information is appropriated according to the publication type. Regarding the tables, I think table 1 is missing a first column that explains the factors compared among the frameworks. If possible, I would like to see this table again.

RESPONSE

We have added a column to specify the factors that were used to compare the frameworks.

REVIEWER TWO: FEEDBACK

1) There are no methods described in the paper. Was there a systematic search of the literature, did you use search terms, how do we (as the readers) know if you found the most relevant literature - how did you find this information? Even if the search was not systematic, please add what methods you did use for your results.

RESPONSE

We have clarified that this work is a commentary and not a review of the literature. We have also indicated on page 3 of the manuscript that we explored relevant literature through online database searches using the words public health, sustainability, health policies, integration and
implementation. The databases searched include; PubMed, CINHAL, Scopus and Google scholar for articles exploring sustainability and how it relates to public health.

On Page 11, we use “Sustainability: theories, models and frameworks” as a “sign post” to point the reader to the content of this section of the commentary.

Being a commentary and not a systematic review of sustainability literature, we note that there are several theories, frameworks, models and tools that have been advanced to guide the evaluation of sustainability in general. We observe that very few of these solely focus on sustainability of public health interventions. We made a deliberate decision not to delve into what differentiates a theory from a framework, model or tool as this would distract the discussion from our main commentary.

Furthermore, we know that the concept of sustainability is confusing, because of variations in terminology, lack of agreed upon measurement frameworks, and methodological challenges. Under sustainable public health, we chose to focus on the work of Schell et al (2013) to highlight ongoing developments that demonstrate the increasing concern and importance accorded to sustainability of public health interventions.

We have added this to the conclusion of the paper by saying “An important next step is to conduct a more thorough and comprehensive review of literature, listing all the different sustainability frameworks, models, theories, by their name, source, constructs and validation status. This review will also attempt to classify how these are used for example; framework versus tool. It will document how various sustainability frameworks, models and theories are applied across health-related fields and programs for example public health versus environmental health or smoking cessation versus clinical well-child visits. Lastly, the review will also attempt to document the settings in which the different sustainability frameworks, models, theories are used such as low-income countries versus high income settings.”

We derived our conclusion based on our observations and in-depth reading/exploring of the literature. We note that despite the increasing concern and importance accorded to sustainability of public health interventions, most of the efforts remain at a conceptual stage with sustainability and related concepts appearing more often in conceptual papers than in empirical articles. We also observed that there is a shortage of tools to measure the sustainability of interventions.

Minor points:

1) Table 2. It would be helpful to have Table 2 on one page so the headings line up. I am assuming this will not be an issue once it is published.

RESPONSE
We have adjusted Table 2 as recommended.

2) Page 11, line 54 - what is the difference between embedding and integration of embedded practices at the practical level?

RESPONSE

Thank you very much for this comment. May, C. and Finch, T. (2009) define “embedding” as making practices routine elements of everyday life (normalizing) and “integration” as “the sustaining of the embedded practices in their social contexts.

3) Page 14, line 50 - "public health decision program stakeholders” is confusing, please clarify

RESPONSE

We have edited this sentence to read as follows: “The purpose of this framework is to help create a shared understanding of sustainability across a variety of public health stakeholders such as decision makers, practitioners, funders, researchers, and evaluators.”

4) Page 16, line 56 - Please add a period between "outcomes" and "The"

RESPONSE

We have added the period between “outcomes” and “The”

ADDITIONAL REVIEW BY ASSOCIATE EDITOR

I would like to add the following issue to be addressed in your response:

As noted by reviewer 2, you have not supplied sufficient methodological description for this paper to be classified as a ‘review’ paper. The definition under the author guidelines of review is:

• “Reviews provide comprehensive and authoritative coverage of a topic area. Key aims of reviews are to provide systematic and substantial coverage of mature subjects, evaluations of progress in specified areas, and/or critical assessments of emerging technologies.”
If you have undertaken a comprehensive literature review underpinned by a systematic search strategy of several databases, please provide details of your search strategy, number of citations screened, inclusion criteria for the review and number of articles included.

If you have not undertaken a comprehensive literature review underpinned by a systematic search strategy of several databases, you should resubmit your articles as a ‘commentary’ – see guidelines here: https://health-policy-systems.biomedcentral.com/submission-guidelines/preparing-your-manuscript/commentary

RESPONSE

Thank you for this comment and guidance. Considering the guidance provided, we have resubmitted this manuscript as a “commentary”.