Reviewer's report

**Title:** Understanding evidence 2: a statewide survey to explore evidence-informed public health decision-making in a local government setting

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 17 October 2013

**Reviewer:** Eivor Oborn

**Reviewer's report:**

This is a well written paper and covers an interesting topic, namely how local authorities use evidence in making decisions. Overall I like the scope and direction of the paper; the title is appropriate as are the methods. Of particular interest is broader (and hence somewhat unusual) context for examining use of evidence within a local authority.

‘Mandatory’ developments

It would be helpful to know a bit more what a ‘local authority’ consists of in the Australian context and more about the role of public health (or respondents) within the LA. Are these MD trained public health doctors replying or some other? This would be helpful since there is reference to the training as being relevant to evidence use, though we don’t know much about what that training consists of and there is likely to be considerable international variation in how public health and local authorities operate.

Discretionary developments-

The paper would also be strengthened if the authors could flesh out the implications of their study further, as it remains highly descriptive (rather than analytic). It is not overly surprising that respondents use mixed sources of evidence to varying degrees in making decisions; this would be anticipated based of other studies that look at evidence use (Eg John Gabbay et al ‘s work on ‘mindlines’). It is also difficult as a reader to sort the implications of evidence being ‘useful’ versus ‘influential’. These seem very similar; what are the implications of the differences in terms of practical utility in understanding decision making? The need for more training is also quite a broad remit—particularly given the multiple interpretations of what evidence actually means to the respondent. As researchers we would put high priority on use of ‘research’ type evidence, trials etc. But there is perhaps more immediate value in being able to interpret real time data analytics regarding current organisationally relevant metrics (eg non attendance at schools or vaccination clinics or smoking cessation etc) or in learning ways to integrate conflicting policy directives (which are relatively common in the UK context at least). The study presents a picture of current ‘evidence’ use, but is less specific about what that evidence consists of and what the value of the diverse sources of evidence might be in the actual context of the local authorities being studied. If some of these questions could be unpacked (eg in the form of implications) this would add value to the reader.
**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