

# CPHI | SPC

Canadian Population Health Initiative | Initiative sur la santé de la population canadienne



## An Environmental Scan of Research Transfer Strategies



Canadian Institute  
for Health Information

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d'information sur la santé

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**Canadian Population Health Initiative  
of the  
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**An Environmental  
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## **About the Canadian Institute for Health Information**

Created by Canada's Health Ministers in 1994, the Canadian Institute for Health Information is a national, independent, not-for-profit organization whose mandate is to coordinate the development and maintenance of a comprehensive and integrated approach to health information for Canada. To this end, the Institute provides and coordinates the provision of accurate and timely data and information required for:

- establishing sound health policy;
- effectively managing the Canadian health system; and
- generating public awareness about factors affecting good health.

The Canadian Population Health Initiative (CPHI) became part of CIHI in 1999 under the Roadmap Initiative.

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## Executive Summary

Knowledge about factors affecting the health of individuals and communities can influence policy and improve the health and well-being of Canadians. To ensure that research evidence on the determinants of health informs policy and decision-making, effective strategies for knowledge transfer and policy engagement are needed. Such strategies need to identify the population health research needs of decision-makers and to engage them in using the results of research on the determinants of health.

To identify a range of strategies for transfer of research knowledge, the Canadian Population Health Initiative (CPHI) conducted an environmental scan of strategies used by government and non-government organizations. This report examines knowledge transfer strategies of 17 organizations involved in health or social research and/or policy. The strategies used by these organizations were analyzed according to three criteria: target audience (WHO was engaged), timing (WHEN during the research process did this engagement occur) and method (HOW was the target audience engaged).

The scan of these organizations found that, although their target audiences varied, organizations shared the same goal—to have their research results and policy options attended to by those who would make practical use of them in policy and decision-making. Specific audiences included policy think tanks, government departments, regional health boards and the media. With respect to timing, organizations engaged decision-makers at various stages of the research process, from the initial identification of research priorities through to outreach

programs after the research was completed. Finally, the methods used to engage audiences ranged from the use of web sites and computer models to employing spokespersons and research transfer officers.

Based on the study findings, it was concluded that dissemination of population health research findings must be targeted at a wide variety of individuals and organizations. Following is a list of existing and potential target audiences for population health research, including a brief rationale for engaging each group:

- *Government departments emphasizing health and social services* are potential collaborators.
- *Policy organizations conducting similar research* have established communication networks with decision-makers.
- *International organizations* add credibility and prestige.
- *Professional organizations* (particularly in the health field) provide access to new audiences.
- *General public* advocates to decision-makers.
- *Community organizations* provide community support and assist in dissemination.
- *Business community* is a key influence on the workplace.
- *Regional health authorities and health care providers* allocate health care services and identify relevant targets for information and service delivery.

Timing is an essential element of population health research transfer. As the environmental scan demonstrates, decision-makers should be engaged early

on and this relationship maintained through all phases of the research, a goal that can be achieved through the ongoing use of collaborative working groups. Funders of population health research can incorporate policy relevance as a criterion for research funding—for example, by having decision-makers and researchers jointly make funding choices. Evaluating the effectiveness of knowledge transfer strategies also allows researchers and funding bodies to enhance the policy relevance of research on continuous basis.

The scan identified the need for a range of outputs appropriate to various target

audiences. Additionally, a number of specific methods were highlighted for encouraging the uptake of research findings by policy and decision-makers, including:

- effectively using web sites;
- building a research transfer strategy into each project;
- establishing formal links and partnerships with policy- and decision-makers;
- employing specialists in research transfer; and
- sponsoring empirical investigations on the transfer of research findings.



## 1. Introduction

The Canadian Population Health Initiative (CPHI) supports research that advances an understanding of the determinants of health for the Canadian population and articulates policy options to improve population health, reduce health inequities and improve the health and well-being of Canadians.

In 1997, following a recommendation by the National Forum on Health, a CPHI pilot project brought together talented researchers and decision makers from across Canada to help bridge leading-edge research and policies related to population health. The 1999 federal budget provided CPHI with additional financial support of 19.9 million dollars over four years.

### **Vision**

CPHI's vision is to mobilize pan-Canadian efforts to achieve a better understanding of how various factors interact to affect the health of individuals and communities, and to support the development of policies aimed at reducing inequities and improving the health and well-being of Canadians. This vision is achieved through research, infrastructure development, policy analysis and knowledge transfer and reporting.

### **Goals**

More specifically, CPHI's goals are to:

- generate new knowledge on the determinants of health;
- build research capacity and scholarship in population health science that complements investments by other funding agencies;
- contribute to the development of population health information systems

- analyze and synthesize population health research findings and promote knowledge transfer and uptake by decision makers;
- undertake policy analysis and develop policy options;
- stimulate public debate and dialogue on the determinants of health; and
- develop reports and disseminate research findings to decision makers and the public.

### **About This Study**

In support of its vision and goals, CPHI conducted an environmental scan of research transfer strategies used by organizations involved with health or social research and policy that also have an emphasis on knowledge transfer. The sample included government and non-governmental organizations, as well as groups doing basic and policy research.

Underlying this study is the conviction that researchers and key decision-makers must interact to create and sustain interest in and uptake of research findings. Ideally, the two groups will form ongoing, collaborative relationships that guide the research and policy-making process. CPHI's goal in undertaking this environmental scan was to identify models of such interactions as one means of informing and shaping its own knowledge brokering activities.

## 2. Methodology

The aim of the environmental scan was to identify successful models of the research-policy exchange that could be used in developing CPHI's knowledge transfer activities. With this in mind, CPHI surveyed a cross-section of 17 research organizations from the academic, policy think tank and governmental sectors to develop a catalogue of strategies for translating research results into policy. Participating organizations shared a common focus on health or social research and policy and an emphasis on knowledge transfer.

To determine the key elements of these organizations' dissemination strategies, three broad questions were posed:

- WHO do you engage? (target audience)
- WHEN during the research process do you engage your audiences? (timing)
- HOW do you engage them? (method)

Responses were grouped into the above categories and analyzed for their relevance to CPHI's mandate. Telephone or e-mail interviews were also conducted with all but two organizations to obtain additional information on how they engaged relevant decision makers with their research results.

The following organizations participated in the study (a brief description and contact information for each organization is provided in Appendix A):

- Applied Research Branch, HRDC (ARB)
- Caledon Institute of Social Policy (CI)
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)
- Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD)

- Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF)
- Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR)
- Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN)
- Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis (CHEPA)—McMaster University
- Centre for Health Services and Policy Research (CHSPR)—University of British Columbia
- Health Evidence, Application and Linkage Network (HEALNet)
- Health Services Utilization and Research Commission (HSURC)—Saskatchewan
- Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Sciences (ICES)
- Institute for Work and Health (IWH)
- Kennedy School of Government (KSG)—Harvard University
- Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation (MCHPE)—University of Manitoba
- Parkland Institute (PI)—University of Alberta
- Population Health Research Unit (PHRU)—Dalhousie University

### 3. Major Findings

Following is an overview of key findings from the environmental scan.

Presentation of these findings corresponds to the three broad questions outlined above.

#### A. Target Audience

An important issue for participating organizations was identifying the most effective targets or receptors for their research findings. Target audiences varied, although the end goal for the organizations was the same: to ensure that their research findings and suggested policy options reached those who could make practical use of them.

A brief description of each of the major target groups identified in the study is provided below.

#### WHO

- policy think tanks
- government departments
- international organizations
- regional health boards
- professional organizations
- the public
- media
- community organizations
- business groups
- alumni
- universities
- clinicians, employees and other professionals

#### Policy Think Tanks

Some of the organizations surveyed maintain formal affiliations with policy groups, permitting an ongoing exchange of research priorities and dissemination of results. This approach serves not only to broaden the research-policy discourse,

but also ensures a wide audience for research findings as well as the policy directions indicated by these findings.

#### Government Departments

A number of organizations interact with government departments, some of which are outside their traditional network. For example, the Applied Research Branch (ARB) of Human Resources and Development Canada (HRDC) has close links with departments such as Heritage Canada, Industry Canada and Health Canada, as well as with provincial and regional counterparts. In one of its working papers, the Institute of Work and Health (IWH) recommended cross-departmental governmental initiatives as a means to more effective transfer of research findings.<sup>1</sup>

Government representatives may also serve on advisory boards that help determine research priorities. For example, the Board of Trustees of the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF) includes *ex officio* representation from Health Canada. This not only allows for expert advice on policy-relevant research but also creates an ongoing link between policy makers and researchers. The faculty at the Kennedy School of Government (KSG) includes many former senior government representatives. Heritage Canada and HRDC are currently co-funding a project at the Caledon Institute (CI) and both departments sit on an advisory committee that guides the project. Several researchers at the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR) participate in government advisory bodies such as the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health.

<sup>1</sup> Lavis J.N., Farrant M.S.R. and Stoddart G.L. *Barriers to Employment-Related Healthy Public Policy* (Working Paper 69) (Toronto: IWH, 1999).

### **International Organizations**

Many organizations are able to raise their profile and acquire greater legitimacy in the eyes of policy makers through their involvement with international groups. These affiliations can also broaden the policy applications of research, potentially affecting an even greater number of people. The Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) has developed an international network of researchers and undertaken joint international projects and health policy conferences. CIAR helped pioneer the widely used “networking paradigm,” which “removes artificial barriers between disciplines to tackle big questions drawing from a wide variety of fields.” The participation of a number of internationally known researchers on the IWH research advisory committee promotes links to the international research community, thereby enhancing opportunities for research transfer.

### **Regional Health Boards**

In general, research is more easily accommodated into local policy making when regional health boards are actively involved in research projects. The Centre for Health Services and Policy Research (CHSPR) has direct project involvement with two regional health boards in British Columbia and hopes to expand its involvement in the near future. Responding to a high turnover rate of health district CEOs, an external audit of the Health Services Utilization and Research Commission (HSURC) recommended that health boards prepare orientation packages to raise awareness among incoming CEOs about the boards as a source of, and potential partner in, health research.

### **Professional Organizations**

In addition to creating new audiences for dissemination, ties to professional

organizations can help ensure that members of the profession adhere to set policies. As well, working with members of the health professions to establish research priorities increases the likelihood that the realities of everyday practice will be reflected. HSURC’s external review recommended closer ties to the Saskatchewan Medical Association, the professional nursing association and the chiropractic association. The Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Sciences (ICES) specifically gears some of its outputs towards health professionals, including the medical students and residents who are the profession’s future decision-makers. ICES publishes decision aids, tools, technical reports, a research “digest” geared towards physicians and a series of Practice Atlases and an Atlas Report. To expand its reach, the organization has forged links with other health-centered organizations, such as the Ontario Hospital Association and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario.

### **The Public**

Some public policy organizations attempt to influence policy makers indirectly by advertising and otherwise making their findings known to the general public. For example, although the Parkland Institute (PI) does not target government directly, it has gained a high profile in Alberta by publicizing and disseminating its research findings widely. A key element of the organization’s success is providing accessible, easy-to-read products that help bridge the gap between the academic community and the public. Two of its publications are widely available in Alberta: *Shredding the Public Interest* and *Clear Answers*. The Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) has adopted a similar strategy, using the media to generate public debate and providing publicly accessible resources, including a

free statistical service on their web site (the Centre for International Statistics).

### **Media**

To ensure wide public dissemination of research findings, many organizations maintain close links with the media. KSG has been particularly effective in this regard, working rigorously to keep the media abreast of newsworthy developments through press releases, personal calls and web presentations. As well, the School sponsors a monthly faculty press luncheon, inviting reporters to hear faculty members speak about issues of news interest.

### **Community Organizations**

Although community groups seldom make policy decisions with far-reaching impacts, they can make a practical contribution to the policy options proposed by research organizations. CI is one organization that undertakes major projects in partnership with community groups. With the support of the Trillium Foundation, CI undertook the Social Partnership Project, which was designed to promote economic and social well-being by building a body of knowledge about social partnerships between private business and non-profit organizations, and by encouraging further research in the area. In addition to highlighting the benefits of community partnerships, the project also points out some of the pitfalls. One of the project's outputs—the "Community Stories" series—influenced many policy-making groups including HRDC, which is one of the project's founders. Funding from the Department of Justice's National Crime Prevention Centre allowed CI to develop a series of community stories on crime prevention through social development.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) often joins forces with community groups to influence decision-makers indirectly. For instance, CCPA's Education Project provides student, teacher and parent groups with information about the effects of restructuring and corporate involvement on public education in Ontario. CCPA's strategy was to target community groups, who would then lobby the government to make policy changes. The project proved very successful in raising various education issues in the public consciousness.

The Population Health Research Unit (PHRU) received funding from CHSRF to develop information materials on how to use the Internet to locate research information on children's health and social services. It worked in association with the United Way, the Nova Scotia Child-Care Connection and the Growing Together program of North Dartmouth, along with various health boards.

### **Business Groups**

There are a number of benefits to working with private businesses. Larger corporations, in particular, can be a source of funding for large-scale projects and research endeavours and also can act as "natural laboratories" for studying influences on the lives of workers. From this perspective, the heads of businesses can be considered as important decision-makers.

The Health Evidence, Application and Linkage Network (HEALNet) is conducting research on the application of evidence-based information at the level of the workplace. To this end, it has developed a workplace risk assessment and ergonomic model for use in the auto sector as a tool to reduce injury and

assist production engineers. Two of the organization's computer models, CLINT (Clinical Integrator) and CTF Prevent, were so successful at helping physicians and patients make evidence-based decisions that they were commercialized by a private corporation. Now used widely in the United States and Alberta, the models will soon be available in Saskatchewan.

### **Alumni**

One of the ways schools engage decision makers is by maintaining links with their alumni. KSG has a separate department dedicated to communicating with alumni, some of who have gone on to serve in cabinet positions and as advisors to presidents.

### **Universities**

Many of the organizations in the scan are part of or have formal affiliations with universities (e.g. IWH, PHRU, MCHPE, CHEPA, CHSPR) and/or some of their members have university appointments (e.g. CIAR, HEALNet, CPRN). Such connections serve to broaden the spheres of influence of researchers and lend credibility to these organizations.

## **B. Timing**

Another important element of knowledge transfer strategies is timing—at what point in the research process should efforts be made to create ties with potential users?

As Lomas has argued,<sup>2</sup> research is a process and not a product. In fact, it has been shown that early and ongoing involvement of relevant decision-makers in the conceptualization and conduct of a

research investigation is the best predictor of application of findings.

Many of the organizations participating in the scan have adopted this approach and use various means to involve relevant decision-makers early in the research and knowledge transfer cycle. The following discussion presents a number of examples demonstrating the importance of proper timing in strategies to engage decision-makers—*before* the research begins, *during* the research process and *after* the research is completed.

#### **WHEN**

##### ***Before the research begins:***

- environmental scanning
- outreach program
- policy review panels

##### ***During the research process:***

- working groups

##### ***After the research is completed:***

- study release strategies
- parliamentary process
- follow-up evaluation

##### ▪ ***Before the research begins:***

This scan of the dissemination strategies of government and non-government policy research organizations demonstrated the importance of involving target audiences early on in the research process. Organizations participating in the scan made it a priority to actively solicit input on research needs and conduct a thorough study of research gaps before initiating their research.

#### ***Environmental Scanning***

HSURC has developed a model of “environmental assessment” that is initiated before research begins. It involves scanning the broad political,

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<sup>2</sup> Lomas, J. “Connecting Research and Policy” Isuma Spring 2000, p. 140.

social and economic environments to determine current trends and gaps in the research, thus ensuring that the research will be timely and relevant. As well, HSURC keeps abreast of media reports related to health through its in-house news clipping service (“Health Clips”). Research Transfer Officers play a key role in environmental assessment,<sup>3</sup> interacting regularly with important stakeholders to find out what issues are relevant now and will be in the future. All HSURC staff participate in the information gathering process, contacting the CEOs and utilization coordinators of health districts, union and other professional organization leaders, government staff and elected representatives, and others in the health system. Research Transfer Officers coordinate these efforts, compiling the information into concise reports that assist the Board in establishing research priorities.

ARB also uses a method of environmental scanning, examining existing research and consulting with policy makers and experts. The goal is to determine the current state of knowledge and identify research gaps in particular issue areas. Large survey and data collection activities are undertaken once knowledge transfer gaps have been identified.

CHSRF works in partnership with its Board of Trustees, which includes *ex officio* government members and experts in dissemination, to determine research priorities in advance of the studies being conducted. Research themes are established through a national consultation process.

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<sup>3</sup> A full description of the role and function of Research Transfer Officers is provided below under “Method of Engagement.”

### *Policy Review Panels*

Another strategy used by CHSRF is to evaluate project proposals through a Merit Review Panel, rather than a traditional peer review committee. Half the panel is made up of other researchers who help determine the merits of the proposal on a scientific and methodological basis. The remainder of the panel is made up of decision-makers, who help to ensure the policy relevance of the research.

### *Outreach Programs*

Other groups take a proactive approach through outreach programs. For example, PHRU attends meetings of community and government groups to identify research projects. PHRU representatives also visit school boards, First Nations’ reserves and community groups to find out about their needs and how they can be of assistance. The Executive Director of CHSRF conducts cross-country tours, holding regional workshops and strategic discussions to determine relevant areas for research and to establish an ongoing exchange between decision makers and researchers.

#### ▪ *During the research process:*

Participating organizations maintained the involvement of stakeholder groups over the course of the research process by inviting their participation in a variety of working groups. Some examples are provided below:

### *Working Groups*

HSURC involves key stakeholders by inviting them to serve as members of project working groups. The organization recruits from stakeholder groups to help develop research questions, thereby investing these groups in the research process right from the start. Stakeholders are involved throughout the research

process and recommend changes as it proceeds. This helps to ensure effective dissemination of findings once the studies are completed.

At one time, CHEPA used annual policy conferences as its main dissemination tool, bringing together policy-and decision-makers to hear the results of research. Although CHEPA received positive feedback about these conferences, they were discontinued in favour of stakeholder workshops. As a result, CHEPA has saved money (the conferences were much more expensive than the workshops). As well, the literature shows that smaller, interactive groups involving researchers and policy-and decision-makers are much more effective as a transfer tool than passive presentation of research results.

ICES maintains a Stakeholder Advisory Committee, with representatives of 30 organizations, to suggest ideas for research initiatives and to undertake ongoing transfer of research findings. As well, the organization holds regular meetings of a Ministry of Health ICES Liaison Committee to determine the Ministry's information needs and research priorities.

▪ ***After the research is completed:***

Participating organizations identified a number of strategies for making stakeholders aware of the results of the research after it was completed. These included:

***Study Release Strategies***

Various strategies are employed when the final results of research are about to be released. For example, IWH attempts to integrate research findings and link them with broad themes, rather than releasing studies one by one. Lomas, cited above,

writes that too often findings from single studies are disseminated in the absence of a larger policy context. The challenge for researchers and funding agencies is to ensure that policy focussed summary and synthesis of research knowledge becomes the unit of research transfer.

The timing of final release is important. For example, the CCPA released its *Missing Pieces* publication on the insensitivity of the media to certain social effects of policy at the same time as the *Maclean's* annual report cards on universities. As a result, many journalists linked the study to the universities' report cards to show gaps in the magazine's evaluation of the schools.

Sometimes it is important to alert stakeholders about the upcoming release of study findings. For example, HSURC's Research Transfer Officer prepared a stakeholder information package including past research and the new study. Two stakeholder meetings were held, one in Regina and one in Saskatoon, just prior to the general release of the study. Because they received a "heads up" about the findings before the release of the study, stakeholders were able to respond effectively to media requests for information about the policy implications of the research.

***Parliamentary Process***

Some policy groups, such as CCSD and CCPA, meet with Members of Parliament before important bills are passed to advise them on their impact. They use as evidence some of the research findings their organization has produced.

***Follow-up/Evaluation***

Another post-research strategy is to ensure adequate follow-up to determine the impact of an organization's products



on policy. Through its Development Fund—Communications Infrastructure Development Grants, CHSRF is soliciting proposals for one-time funding of projects by research organizations to improve their research dissemination capacity. Final reports must set out a process for evaluating how effective the project was in turning research into policy. As well, the IWH routinely evaluates the impact of the information it delivers in the making of policy.

**C. Method:**

Recognizing that no single dissemination method will be effective in all situations, most of the organizations in the scan used a variety of means to engage decision-makers. As the examples below illustrate, the target audiences and the messages that need to be conveyed generally shape the methods used to interact with decision-makers.

<b>HOW</b>
<p><b>Electronic Products</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ web sites</li> <li>■ computer models</li> </ul>
<p><b>Tailored Products/Messages</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ accessible research products</li> <li>■ integrated messages</li> <li>■ student essay contest</li> </ul>
<p><b>Specialized Personnel</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ charismatic spokesperson</li> <li>■ research transfer officers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Research, Collaboration and Capacity Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ training and review</li> <li>■ joint projects</li> <li>■ sub-specialized research centres</li> <li>■ research on transfer strategies</li> <li>■ transfer strategy requirements</li> <li>■ capacity building</li> </ul>
<p><b>Membership</b></p>

■ **Electronic Products**

*Web Sites*

Each of the organizations surveyed maintains an extensive web site that provides visitors with information about current research projects, prior research and, in some cases, statistical services. CHSPR maintains a current e-network news service, featuring short updates about research projects and corporate activities, as well as notices of new publications, discussion papers, roundtable notes, commentaries and upcoming events. In addition to posting news releases, CIAR’s web site contains general program descriptions, an overview of the organization’s objectives and activities, and detailed profiles of program members. News releases are also posted on the web site.

*Computer Models*

Some policy research organizations systematically use computer and other models to turn research results into policy. If they are user-friendly, these models allow decision makers to conveniently apply research in an accessible format. HEALNet develops large-scale data linkage and information application systems to help decision-makers use their research. CLINT software used by HEALNet provides immediate Internet access to selected information for enhancing the decision-making capabilities of patients, providers and health care organizations.<sup>4</sup> For health care organizations, CLINT is able to perform continuous quality audits, assessment, and improvement based on knowledge and application access and use. The software was so popular in Alberta during its trial period that it was

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Robert Hayward, now of the Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine at the University of Alberta, developed the software program CLINT (Clinical Integrator) for HEALNet.

later commercialized and is now sold widely in the United States and Canada through the InfoWard Corporation.

Another successful program in the area of population health is POPULIS (Population Health Information System). Developed by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, POPULIS focuses on the relationship between health and the use of health care services. It provides information to help Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) assess and respond to questions on such issues as patterns of surgery corresponding with needs, the relative needs of nursing home beds versus hospital beds, access to health care across different socio-economic groups and physician supply. POPULIS tracks all health care services used by the people in a particular area, regardless of what health care facility was used, and allows for sub-groupings of communities within each RHA. One benefit of the program is that it permits baseline assessments to be made before RHAs make changes to their health care delivery system, providing a reference point against which future policy or program decisions can be measured.

Like CLINT, POPULIS has received substantial positive feedback and extensive recognition. It is currently in use by the universities of Victoria, Alberta and Dalhousie, and other universities are planning to make use of it in the future. Unlike CLINT, however, there have been no plans to commercialize the POPULIS software.

Other models initiated by HEALNet include the Health and Safety Balanced Scorecard. In association with the IWH, the program was developed to provide a concise overview of health and safety in an organization and helps workplaces focus strategy on key determinants. It

can also help operationalize a health and safety strategy, communicate it up and down an organization, provide essential data for operational managers, and contribute to the improvement of health and safety outcomes. Indicators can be customized to any workplace. Yet another model developed by IWH and HEALNet is the Performance Assessment Tool to help employers evaluate their workplace with respect to worker stress. These models assist in integrating research findings into policy in a convenient and systematic way that is accessible to decision makers.

#### ▪ Tailored Products/Messages

##### *Accessible Research Products*

As discussed earlier, many groups try to ensure that their research products are accessible to a wide audience. For example, Alberta's PI produced two "popular" studies for which there was a high level of public demand. ICES makes its Practice Atlas and Atlas Reports series accessible to a variety of stakeholders, including policy makers and clinicians. Research staff in CIAR's Population Health, Human Development and Economic Growth area have collaborated on books designed to serve the needs of a broad audience, including policy makers, other academics and the general public. Some organizations specialize in publishing pithy reports on issues of broad public interest. For example, CCPA issues an Alternative Federal Budget to coincide with the release of the official federal budget.

##### *Integrated Messages*

One strategy for reaching specific audiences is to tailor messages targeting their particular areas of concern. This can be achieved by synthesizing multiple research results, rather than relying on

one or two sources of evidence. Addressing thematic issues by applying meta-synthesis approaches (high-level conceptual integration) serves to integrate the evidence base and develop new insights into issues. The experience of many organizations suggests that most policy audiences are seeking integrated information and new knowledge about issues of concern to them.

#### *Student Essay Contests*

Some organizations, such as PI, sponsor student essay contests to increase awareness among future decision makers about the Institute and its work.

#### ▪ **Specialized Personnel**

##### *Spokespersons*

Many groups benefit from having well-known and charismatic leaders serve as their spokesperson. Leaders with a strong reputation for research integrity and policy savvy are frequently invited by the media to comment on various issues and are often featured speakers at policy research forums.

##### *Research Transfer Officers*

Many groups employ Research Transfer Officers (RTOs) with specialized knowledge in communications, journalism, public relations, etc., whose responsibility is to create and maintain links with decision-makers. At HSURC for example, RTOs interact regularly with decision-makers and stakeholders, and are proactive in determining the policy priorities of communities.

#### ▪ **Research, Collaboration and Capacity Building**

##### *Training and Review*

To help bridge the gap between academics and decision makers, organizations such as CHSRF and CHEPA

train their researchers on how to communicate more effectively. Some groups, such as HSURC and CPRN, undergo regular external reviews to gauge the effectiveness of their transfer strategies. Recommendations made by HSURC's 1998 external review committee on improving the organization's research transfer capacity were implemented promptly.

##### *Joint Projects*

As discussed earlier, many organizations undertake joint projects with decision-makers including, for example, CHSPR's projects with local health boards and ICES' projects with the Ministry of Health. One of the recommendations made by HSURC's external review committee was that in-kind contributions be used as a method of engaging partners who are not otherwise able to afford joint sponsorship of research. All CHSRF-funded projects must include a decision-maker partner and many projects receive some funding from a decision-making organization. Other joint projects are collaborations between research groups and funding agencies, such as the partnership between CHSR and CIHR for coordinating knowledge transfer efforts.

##### *Sub-specialized Research Centres*

A few organizations have created sub-specialized research branches or separate centres. CPRN operates three separate research networks, in Health, Work and Family. A fourth branch, Corporate, initiates research projects transcending all three networks. A director, who is responsible for developing the research agenda and disseminating research findings, heads each network. KSG is a federation of separate policy centres, each in charge of a different area of research. Included in the federation are the Malcolm Wiener Center for Social

Policy, the Institute of Politics and the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations.

#### *Research on Transfer Strategies*

Some organizations are directly involved in the study of research transfer strategies. For example, CPRN is currently undertaking a Policy Research Project to explore ways of improving relationships within the policy research community and making policy research infrastructure work more effectively. CPRN hopes to develop a model of “common space” that will encourage agenda sharing, support coordinated research, facilitate personal and professional exchanges and promote linkages.

CHSRF sponsors Communications Infrastructure Development Grants that provide funding to research organizations for improving their policy transfer capacity. HEALNet is currently sponsoring a program to solicit and fund projects on “Decisions and Evidence: Uptake of Evidence in Multiple Level Decision-Making.” The forthcoming results of the program will help research organizations raise their visibility among decision-makers. CHEPA has an active research program on policy decision-making, including the factors that influence how these decisions are made.

#### *Transfer Strategy Requirements*

For many organizations—such as CPRN and PI—research transfer strategies are

incorporated into projects as a regular requirement. HSURC commits one quarter of its budget to the dissemination and implementation of its research findings.

#### *Capacity Building*

Groups such as CHSPR build capacity within policy making organizations as a means of ensuring that decision makers are able to make effective and continued use of research data. As an extension of Lomas’ linkage and exchange model of developing early and continued relations with stakeholders during the entire research process, capacity building may involve strengthening research capacity in partner organizations. For example, CHSPR attempts to foster independence in external partner groups, by giving them the skills to investigate other issues of interest. PHRU issues briefs, such as “How to Read a Paper: Statistics for the Non-statistician,” to inform decision-makers on how to make use of research.

#### *Membership*

IWH’s membership program is targeted to Workman’s Compensation Boards, one of the most important audiences for their research. Launched in 1999, the program has both Canadian and American members.

Table 1 summarizes the strategies discussed above, and indicates which organizations in the scan employ particular approaches.

**Table 1. Summary of Research Transfer Strategies**

	<b>STRATEGY</b>	<b>ORGANIZATION</b>
<b>Target Group</b> (Who is engaged?)	Government Departments	ARB, KSG, IWH, CIAR
	International Organizations	CPRN, IWH, CIAR
	Regional Health Authorities	CHSPR
	Professional Organizations	ICES, IWH
	Public	PI
	Media	KSG
	Community Organizations	CI, CCPA, PHRU
	Business Groups	HEALNet
	Research Alumni	KSG
<b>Timing</b> (When are they engaged?)	Environmental Scanning	HSURC, ARB
	Outreach Programs	PHRU, CHSRF
	Review Panels	CHSRF
	Working Groups	CHEPA, HSURC, ICES
	Study Release Strategies	CCPA, HSURC
	Parliamentary Process	CCPA, CCSD
	Follow-up/Evaluation	CHSRF, IWH
<b>Method</b> (How are they engaged?)	Web Site	ICES, CHSPR, IWH, CIAR
	Computer Models	HEALNet, CHEPA, IWH
	Accessible Research Products	CIAR, CCPA, ICES, PI
	Wide Variety of Outputs	ICES, CIAR
	Integrated Messages	IWH
	Student Essay Contests	PI
	Research Transfer Officers	HSURC
	Training and Review	CCPA, CHEPA, CHSRF, CPRN, HSURC
	Joint Research Projects	CHSPR, CHSR, CIHR, HSURC, ICES
	Sub-Specialization	KSG, CPRN
	Research on Transfer Strategies	CPRN, CHSRF, CHEPA, HEALNet
	Transfer Strategy Requirements	RN, PI, HSURC
	Capacity Building	CHSPR, PHRU
Membership	IWH	

**Legend**

ARB	Applied Research Branch, HRDC
CIAR	Canadian Institute for Advanced Research
CCPA	Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
CCSD	Canadian Council on Social Development
CHEPA	Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis
CHSPR	Centre for Health Services and Policy Research
CHSRF	Canadian Health Services Research Foundation
CI	Caledon Institute of Social Policy
CPRN	Canadian Policy Research Network
HEALNet	Health Evidence, Application and Linkage Network
HSURC	Health Services Utilization and Research Commission
ICES	Institute for Clinical and Evaluative Sciences
IWH	Institute for Work and Health
KSG	Kennedy School of Government
PHRU	Population Health Research Unit
PI	Parkland Institute

## 4. Conclusion

Population health research is conceptually and technically complex. It is not an easy task for researchers to ensure that their research findings are readily accessible to and understood by policy makers and others who might use this knowledge. Yet, by definition, population health research is policy oriented. For population health research to contribute to policies that reduce inequities and improve the health and well being of Canadians, research findings must be transferred from researchers to policy- and decision-makers. To accomplish this, there must be interaction between these two groups.

CPHI seeks to generate new knowledge on the determinants of health. Just as important as *creating* new knowledge, however, is *synthesizing* the information and *transferring* it in a digestible form to those who shape policy and make decisions affecting health. One of CPHI's aims is to support and create forums and vehicles for researchers and decision-makers to exchange information and build enduring linkages.

This scan of research organizations involved in health/social services research and knowledge transfer has identified a broad range of research transfer strategies and processes that have improved research-policy linkages and encouraged the uptake of new knowledge by decision makers. For the purposes of this scan, it has been useful to consider the successful linkages and exchanges between researchers and decision makers in terms of *who*, *when* and *how* to target important messages from the research findings.

Taken together, the experiences of these organizations represent a valuable tool kit for CPHI and others in applying research

knowledge to policies that will affect the health and well-being of Canadians. Below are some of the key strategies and techniques identified in this scan for making population health research relevant to policy needs.

### **Who to engage:**

- For the most effective transfer of population health research findings, a wide variety of partners should be engaged, with specific audiences targeted, depending upon the issues under study.
- Policy organizations should develop collaborative links with one another.
- A wide range of government departments should be targeted—not only those in the health field, but any department that deals with social or other determinants of population health.
- Links with international communities should be pursued as they lend legitimacy to population health research and facilitate international comparisons.
- Professional organizations both within and outside the health sector are important target groups as they can be influential in policy development.
- The broader public is a useful partner for effecting indirect research transfer to decision- makers.
- Closer ongoing linkages with the media can be achieved through regular meetings, news releases, etc.
- Community organizations can be effective partners in joint projects as they represent, and have access to, wider audiences.
- The business community is an important target for research transfer since members are important decision-makers in the workplace, globalization

and the shift to a knowledge-based economy, all of which are major factors affecting the health of populations.

**When to engage:**

- Engagement with stakeholders and decision-makers should take place early on and be continuous throughout the research process.
- Environmental scanning is an effective tool for surveying the political, social and economic environments in order to set research priorities.
- Decision-makers should be involved at the earliest possible stage, for example, on panels that evaluate funding priorities and make research funding decisions. This kind of partnership in setting directions for research increases the chances of research results being used by decision-makers.
- The impact of the research on policy- and decision-makers should be evaluated following the release of results.
- Government officials should be briefed about relevant research before the

passage of bills that may affect population health.

**How to engage:**

- Use working groups rather than conferences to encourage dialogue with those who may turn research results into policy.
- To maximize the uptake of policy messages, produce a variety of outputs, including pamphlets for community groups and the public, technical reports for other researchers and popular publications.
- Develop a concise, readable format for research findings
- Build a research transfer strategy into each project.
- Establish formal links/partnerships with interested organizations and key policy actors.
- Employ a research transfer specialist.
- Create easy-to-use computer models to assess and address the determinants of population health and involve decision-makers in this task.
- Sponsor research specifically on the transfer of population health findings.

## **Appendix A**

### **Participating Organizations**



Unless otherwise indicated, organizations were contacted by telephone or e-mail and asked to describe the specific strategies they used to engage policy makers with their research results (other than strategies listed on their web sites).

### **Population Health Research Unit, Dalhousie University Department of Community Health and Epidemiology (PHRU)**

- A government-funded academic research institute affiliated with Dalhousie University that seeks to provide “efficient and effective support services for population-based research.”
- The Province of Nova Scotia has supplied PHRU with complete Medicare, Pharmacare and hospital files suitable for research purposes. The PHRU also has access to Workers Compensation records and a variety of other data sources, including clinical databases and large-scale population surveys.
- **Contact: 902-494-3860** [www.mcms.dal.ca/gorgs/phru](http://www.mcms.dal.ca/gorgs/phru)

### **The Caledon Institute of Social Policy (CI)**

- A private, non-profit social policy think tank with charitable status, supported primarily by Toronto’s Maytree Foundation.
- CI’s work covers a broad range of social policy areas including income security (e.g., pensions, welfare, child benefits, Employment Insurance, benefits for Canadians with disabilities), taxation, social spending, employment development services, social services and health.
- Seeks to inform social policy experts and policy-makers on issues and developments in Canadian social policy.
- **Contact: 613-729-3340** [www.caledoninst.org](http://www.caledoninst.org)

### **Institute for Work and Health (IWH)**

- An independent, non-profit research organization whose mission is to research and promote new ways to prevent workplace disability, improved treatment, optimal recovery and safe return-to-work.
- Research Transfer is one of the two core businesses of the IWH and is targeted at clinicians and the broader health care community, workplace stakeholders and policy-makers.
- **Contact: 416-927-2027** [www.iwh.on.ca](http://www.iwh.on.ca)

### **Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD)**

- A self-supporting, non-profit research organization focussing on concerns such as income security, employment, poverty, child welfare, pensions and government social policies.
- **Contact: 613-236-8977** [www.ccsd.ca](http://www.ccsd.ca)

### **Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences (ICES)**

- A non-profit, independent organization of researchers funded by the provincial government that is dedicated to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health care for residents of Ontario.
- Its purpose is to gather and analyze health care data that could serve as a catalyst for change, providing information and evidence that can serve as a compass for health policy makers.
- **Contact: 416-480-4055** [www.ices.on.ca](http://www.ices.on.ca)

### **Health Evidence Application and Linkage Network (HEALNet)**

- One of the federal Network of Centres of Excellence, HEALNet is dedicated to putting research to work for health decision makers and information users in the health system and the workplace.
- Focuses on research that optimizes health services research transfer and the use of the best available evidence in decision making.
- Research addresses the health information needs of consumers/citizens, commercial organizations, health care providers, health managers, administrators and policy makers.
- **Contact: 905-525-9140 (ext. 22282)** [www.healnet.mcmaster.ca/nce](http://www.healnet.mcmaster.ca/nce)

### **Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF)**

- An independent, non-profit corporation that was established in 1996 through a \$65 million federal grant. It was charged with sponsoring research and applying research findings to the management of health services.
- Its objectives are to identify research gaps and needs, define priorities in the field of health services research, fund research projects, and to promote best practices of health service delivery and the communication of research outcomes.
- **Contact: 613-728-2238** [www.chsrf.ca](http://www.chsrf.ca)

### **Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA)**

- An independent, non-profit research organization funded primarily through organizational and individual membership.
- Promotes research on economic and social policy issues from a progressive point of view.
- **Contact: 613-563-1341** [www.policyalternatives.ca](http://www.policyalternatives.ca)

### **Applied Research Branch—Human Resources and Development Canada (ARB)**

- Branch of the federal government that generates policy-relevant research to guide HRDC in developing creative solutions to labour market, employment, human capital development, income security, social development, labour adjustment and workplace innovation issues and problems.
- Establishes HRDC’s research and survey priorities, seeks evidence on the nature of Canada’s human development issues through research and policy analysis, and assesses the impact of possible policy interventions.
- **Contact:** [www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca](http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca)

### **Health Services Utilization and Research Commission—Saskatchewan (HSURC)**

- An arm’s length, government-funded agency with a mandate to assess Saskatchewan’s health system and make recommendations for evidence-based change. It is also the provincial health research granting agency.
- **Contact:** 306-655-1500 [www.sdh.sk.ca/hsurc](http://www.sdh.sk.ca/hsurc)

### **Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation (MCHPE)—University of Manitoba**

- A unit in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba that conducts research on the way health care services is used by Manitobans.
- It examines patterns of illness in the population, and studies how people use health care services as well as the factors that affect health.
- It is funded mostly by Manitoba Health under a five-year plan.
- **Contact:** 204-789-3819 [www.umanitoba.ca/centres/mchpe](http://www.umanitoba.ca/centres/mchpe)

### **Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIAR)**

- A non-profit research corporation with charitable status.
- A research institute dedicated to the advancement of basic knowledge—how and why things happen in nature and in the human community—and to the implications of this knowledge for the everyday world.
- Included in the CIAR is the Population Health Program that seeks to understand how social, economic, environmental, cultural and genetic factors, together with health care, determine the health status of whole populations.
- **Contact:** 416-971-4251 [www.ciar.ca](http://www.ciar.ca)

### **Parkland Institute (PI)—University of Alberta**

- A research network within the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta with a mandate to “conduct research on economic, social, cultural, and political issues facing Albertans and Canadians; publish research and provide informed comment on public issues; sponsor conferences and colloquia; bring together the academic and non-academic communities; and train graduate students.”
- The Institute is not a lobby group. They do not stress particular policy alternatives, but rather just inform public debate.
- **Contact:** 780-492-0417 [www.ualberta.ca/PARKLAND](http://www.ualberta.ca/PARKLAND)

### **Centre for Health Economics and Policy Analysis, McMaster University (CHEPA)**

- A research institute associated with McMaster University that is funded in equal parts by the university, the Ontario Ministry of Health, and outside sources (largely private foundations and corporations from both within and outside the health sector).
- Its mission is “to promote a collegial and supportive interdisciplinary environment in which decisions made through consensus foster excellence in acquiring, producing and communicating socially-relevant knowledge in the fields of health economics and health policy analysis.”
- They do this through research and educational programs. They also take requests from groups and individuals outside the university for advice and consultation on health economics and policy analysis issues.
- **Contact:** 905-525-9140 (ext. 22122) [www.chepa.mcmaster.ca](http://www.chepa.mcmaster.ca)

### **Centre for Health Services and Policy Research—University of British Columbia (CHSPR)**

- A research branch of the University of British Columbia that endeavours to “stimulate scientific enquiry into issues of health in population groups and ways in which health services can best be organized, funded and delivered.”
- Its goal is to “encourage and promote first-class research by facilitating the development of cross-disciplinary approaches.”
- **Contact:** 604-822-4810 [www.chspr.ubc.ca](http://www.chspr.ubc.ca)

### **Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (KSG)**

- A federation of research centres and individual faculty associated with Harvard University whose mission is to “strengthen democratic governance around the world by training people for public leadership and by helping to solve problems of public policy.”
- **Contact:** 617-495-9378 [www.ksg.harvard.edu](http://www.ksg.harvard.edu)

### **Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN)**

- A non-profit policy research organization with charitable status that is funded by government, foundations and corporations.
- Its mission is to “create knowledge and lead public debate on social and economic issues important to the well-being of Canadians.”
- **Contact:** 613-567-7640 [www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org)