

School for Public Health Research

## Public Health Evidence Briefing

Building the evidence for cost-effective public health practice

### How do public health professionals view and engage with research?

- At a time of shrinking resources, decisions to invest or disinvest need to be founded on good evidence, but practitioners tell us of their difficulties in accessing, understanding and utilising research.
- This study examined two schemes aimed at enhancing collaboration between academics and practitioners to see how these overcame known barriers to knowledge use.
- Though both schemes had something significant to offer practitioners, significant cultural barriers remain in the path of simple knowledge translation.



# Increasing financial pressures in public health dictate a need to ensure decisions are properly evidence-informed. However, there are barriers to public health professionals engaging with research produced by academics.

## Key issues

- Practitioners and policymakers have difficulty accessing academic research findings and interpreting conflicting findings or different levels of evidential proof.
- Academic timescales often do not align with the rapid demands of the policy process.
- Academic evidence is just one form of information driving policymakers' decisions.
- There is a need for more opportunities for researchers and practitioners to work together to generate research findings of greater use to public health practice.
- Academic organisations have experimented with new responsive services to create such opportunities.

## What we did

This research focused on examples from two responsive research schemes: the Public Health Practitioner Evaluation Scheme run by the NIHR SPHR; and AskFuse, operated by Fuse. In-depth interviews were conducted with a small sample of professionals and academics involved in both schemes. The study verified and expanded on the results in a regional stakeholder workshop.

[www.sphr.nihr.ac.uk](http://www.sphr.nihr.ac.uk) @NIHRSPHR

## Findings and implications

- Public health professionals recognised the importance of research findings for informing their practice and decision making.
- The responsive research schemes increased access to research findings. However, other barriers remained, such as differences in timescales, shrinking resources to pay for research time, competing political pressures or local evidence of need.
- Increased mutual awareness of the structures and challenges under which practitioners and university researchers work is required. Collaborative models, such as the use of researchers embedded in practice and student placements may enable this.

*“I think the challenge is being in an environment where you get the opportunity to understand what academia is doing and for them to understand what we’re doing. Certainly, since we’ve moved to local authority, we’ve lost some of that ability to do that”*  
Public health practitioner /non-user, AskFuse.

## References:

Link to Implementation Science article when published  
<http://www.fuse.ac.uk/research/briefs/How%20do%20public%20health%20professionals%20view%20and%20engage%20with%20research%20evidence.pdf>

## SPHR Contact/Find out more about this study at:

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