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Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs: A Review and Synthesis of Evaluation Strategies in the United States

A special report prepared by the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit examines comprehensive tobacco control programs in leading U.S. jurisdictions. The report focuses on evaluation infrastructure and methodologies, including measures of short-term impacts and long-term outcome with respect to program goals of prevention, cessation, and protection.

Key evaluation resources used by U.S. jurisdictions are:

- tobacco-specific population surveys, which allow evaluators to gather data on a wide spectrum of tobacco related knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours. These ongoing surveys should consist of a common core set of questions, and a more flexible module that can react to new developments or address particular programming and evaluation questions. The surveys should be repeated annually, with monthly data collection. The flexibility and timeliness of monthly data collections will aid program planners in their efforts to better understand the determinants of changing prevalence and the impact of policy changes.
- progress report forms, prescribed for different streams of funded projects (education-related, media interventions, community initiatives, research, etc.). Streamed in this manner, progress report forms can result in cleaner data and thus lead to more useful measures of program implementation. Additionally, submission of program data via progress report forms acts as an accountability mechanism for funded projects.
- a management information system (MIS) consisting of data collected and compiled from progress report forms and used for later analysis. An MIS allows evaluators to track: the success of grantees in reaching target populations; the extent to which funded activities correspond with government priorities; and the extent to which organizations collaborate and build capacity amongst themselves and with local governments.

Highlights of general recommendations for evaluating a comprehensive program fall into four categories:

- Leadership & Co-ordination
- Assign primary responsibility for evaluation to ensure the evaluation program is systematic and rigorous.
- Conduct the evaluation at arm's length from the government to lend credibility to the evaluation process and reported results.

- Implementation Evaluation
- Provide advice and consultation to tobacco control program funded projects regarding their evaluation plans, designs, and forms of reporting.
- Develop an MIS to track tobacco control activities in the province. This will enhance the capacity of the tobacco control program to evaluate progress toward its goals, particularly if the jurisdiction is committed to local-level initiatives and community capacity building.
- Impact Evaluation
- The overall evaluation design should consider impact both provincially and locally, as well as impact on specific priority groups (e.g., youth and pregnant women).
- Focus on an overall impact evaluation, in addition to separate impact evaluations of each program component. This will allow evaluators to examine impacts and synergistic effects in a cost-effective manner.
- Funding
- Establish sustained, core funding to support the main components of the tobacco control program as well as overall evaluation activities and infrastructure (e.g., personnel, data collection instruments, etc.).
- Invest in research, in addition to strict evaluation activities, to support the long-term success of the tobacco control program.

Jurisdictions that commit to the implementation of a sustained comprehensive evaluation system can expect a number of positive benefits. On the basis of evaluation data, informed decisions can be made about which aspects of the program are working and which aspects are in need of re-thinking or refinement. A rigorous and comprehensive evaluation is essential to ensure that program efforts are both focused and maximally effective and efficient, as jurisdictions strive onward toward program goals of prevention, cessation, and protection.

More information is provided in the following:

[O'Connor S.C.](#), Cohen J.E., Osterlund K. Comprehensive Tobacco Control Programs: A Review and Synthesis of Evaluation Strategies in the United States. Ontario Tobacco Research Unit, Special Report, Toronto, June 2001.