



NOPREN is a thematic network of the Prevention Research Centers Program. NOPREN conducts nutrition- and obesity-related policy research and evaluation related to the effectiveness of policies that improve access to affordable, healthy foods and beverages in a variety of settings, including communities, workplaces, healthcare facilities, childcare institutions, and schools.

ABOUT

The Policy Research Impact Working Group (PRIWG) focuses on researching and enhancing the channels of communication between nutrition and obesity researchers and policymakers. The PRIWG involves participation of core group members, who contribute to discussions and provide input and ideas for new projects or planning.

How can we move research findings from policy implications to policy impact?

Our purpose is to better understand and build connections in the space between researchers and policymakers, including the role of intermediaries, such as advocacy groups. We hope to explore methods and best practices for researchers to better utilize this space in conducting and communicating their research, from initial idea-generation through dissemination of findings. This includes, but is not limited to, areas such as policy communication and dissemination research, public opinion research, and political communications. Focus will include policymakers at all levels, with emphasis on state/local policymakers.

Key Activities and Findings:

Key focal research areas include: 1) Assessing how research evidence enters into and is sustained in policy pathways and ways those pathways can be improved; 2) Understanding how the connections between researchers, policymakers, and intermediaries undergird research use and could be optimized; 3) Exploring how other fields liaise with policy pathways; 4) Identifying research opportunities to fill knowledge gaps in these areas.

Activity 1: Conduct qualitative research to better understand how researchers engage with policymakers.

We interviewed a sample of public health nutrition and obesity researchers who were recruited for their high involvement in policy communication to better understand how they communicate and engage with policymakers. Findings from this research are currently in the publication phase.

Key findings to date:

- Wide variation existed in terms of researcher practices for communicating and engaging with policymakers along with mixed beliefs about whether and when researchers should be doing this, even among a sample of researchers recruited for their high involvement in policy communication.
- Noted barriers to communicating and engaging with policymakers included lack of formalized training and a promotion process and professional culture that does not value this practice. Facilitators ranged from individual-level (e.g., desire to “make a difference”; relationships with collaborators) to institutional-level (e.g., training/mentorship support; support from the institution), and research-driven (e.g., relevant topic; funder support).
- Researchers also agreed that the link between researchers and policymakers could be improved and suggested strategies, such as more formal training, better use of intermediaries, and learning how to cultivate relationships.
- Participants in this study consistently and repeatedly underscored the need for more systematic



exploration and discussion about how to guide infrastructure and training in order to better support researcher communication and engagement with policymakers.

Activity 2: Review current literature and identify knowledge gaps

We are conducting an environmental scan of peer-reviewed manuscripts and grey literature that provide insights on how nutrition and obesity policy research gets used by policymakers with an emphasis on elected officials in the US at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels.

Key findings to date:

- Preliminary findings from the review indicate there are relatively few researchers and funding sources tackling this area of research; even less particular to nutrition and obesity policy research issues and opportunities.

Activity 3: Share and Build on our work

We are seeking outlets to disseminate and share the findings of the PRIWG. We have submitted two publications and submitted several conference abstracts. PRIWG members are also seeking funds to build upon and continue our work.

Activity 4: Build partnerships and collaborations

PRIWG is sharing evidence gathered and exploring possible collaborative projects with the National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (www.nccor.org) Get Research Used (GRU) Workgroup. NCCOR brings together four of the nation's leading funders—CDC, NIH, RWJF, and USDA to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and application of childhood obesity research, and to halt—and reverse—childhood obesity. GRU grew out of recommendations put forth by the NCCOR External Scientific Panel (NESP), which serves as a valuable liaison between NCCOR and the extramural community, informing NCCOR on new science and ideas and on connections to extramural research, practice and policy. NESP also contributes to the ongoing refinement of NCCOR's strategic plan, including helping to establish key performance indicators and other metrics associated with evaluating the impact of NCCOR. GRU aims to empower researchers to translate results and findings to accelerate progress in reducing childhood obesity. Proposed GRU projects include endorsing existing resources and tools—and developing resources where needed—designed to build researchers skills around research translation.

NEXT STEPS:

The PRIWG has identified priority action items:

- Use findings from qualitative research to inform development of a larger, online survey about knowledge, practices, experience, and challenges of communicating with policymakers. Survey will be distributed to full membership of NOPREN, PAPRN, and other groups of researchers for a more quantitative description of practices in the field.
- Use findings from environmental scan to develop future research directions.
- Continue to find venues to disseminate our work.
- Continue to assess and build on collaborations with NCCOR GRU.

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