

Connecting policymakers and researchers for improved health policies and programme implementation

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The Alliance supported the participation of more than 20 policy makers from 18 countries to partake in the Fourth Global Symposium in Vancouver.



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AHPSR

"Oftentimes, knowing what works is not enough. It

comes down to how it is operationalised in a country. This is why the Alliance is connecting researchers and policy makers to sit at the same table to find out how best to strengthen health policies and programme implementation," explains, Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, Executive Director, Dr Abdul Ghaffar.

This group, called the Policy Leadership Group met daily during the Symposium to discuss their country-specific experiences about how research is gathered and used to inform policy-making. The group identified three challenges affecting the use of evidence:

- differing mind-sets and interests between policy makers and researchers;
- lack of awareness of locally available evidence; and
- lack of mechanisms to embed research in policy-making.

Commenting on the benefit of having policy makers at the Symposium, Karen Daniels, Specialist Scientist at the Medical Research Council (MRC) and Chair of the South African Initiative for Systematic Reviews on Health Policies and Systems (SAI) said, "As researchers it was invaluable for us to have policy makers present in our sessions, and to also attend sessions at which policy makers were presenting, to understand their needs better. We need more of these occasions to connect and speak both formally and informally. By working together we can undertake research that is better responsive to national priorities and achieve improved health systems for universal health care."

Creating spaces for policy maker and researcher collaboration

The Group with support from the Alliance will facilitate and/or develop mechanisms for regular collaboration such as through online consultations, webinars, and meetings. The group will also host regional meetings where policy makers and researchers can share knowledge and test models for collaboration and learning. The first of these meetings will be hosted in South Africa in 2017.

Later this year the group will release a White Paper offering a blueprint for use by public health agencies, ministries, development partners, and practitioners with guidance on strengthening public health practice. The conference was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research, and the Future Health Systems consortium which is supported by DFID.

Policy steering group established

Following the week-long deliberations, a Policy Leadership Steering Group was established. The steering group will provide guidance and direction for identifying ways to stimulate the demand and use of evidence in policymaking.

The Policy Leadership Group forms part of the Alliance's broader efforts to build linkages between policy makers and researchers.