



# THE EVIDENCE NETWORK OF CANADIAN HEALTH POLICY: MAKING EVIDENCE MATTER

Kristy Wittmeier<sup>1,3</sup>, Carolyn Shimmin<sup>1</sup>, Frank Krupka<sup>1</sup>, Patrick Faucher<sup>1</sup>, Kathleen O'Grady<sup>2</sup>, and Noralou Roos<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Healthcare Innovation; <sup>2</sup>EvidenceNetwork.ca; <sup>3</sup>University of Manitoba

## Science and the media

Mass media is an effective strategy to translate health research evidence [1-5], however it is a tool that is largely under-utilized by academics [6].

Based on a recent survey by PEW Research Centre of nearly 4,000 researchers:

87%

87% felt that researchers should take an active role in public policy debates by engaging with the media

Yet, only

1 in 2

had spoken about their research with journalists

While..

52%

52% felt that over simplification of science in news stories was a major problem

72% had serious doubts about the media's ability to distinguish good and shaky science

EvidenceNetwork.ca has been working since 2011 to address this gap, by linking journalists with health policy experts to provide access to current, credible, evidence-based information. The information is packaged into original **media products** on health policy topics for publication in the mainstream media. In 2013, the Centre for Healthcare Innovation partnered with EvidenceNetwork.ca to support and promote the translation of evidence through the media.

## How does EvidenceNetwork.ca work?

EvidenceNetwork.ca's most successful initiative thus far has been helping researchers author evidence-based OpEd pieces on health policy issues for mainstream media. **OpEds (short for "opposite the editorial page") are opinion pieces of 650 words or less** that present an informed view on a newsworthy topic, emphasizing the author's insight as well as their unique expertise. OpEds can be accompanied by **backgrounders, podcasts, infographics and videos** for journalists and the public to help them better report on and understand health topics.

*These pieces are generally printed 'as is' by the media – thus overcoming researcher concerns about HOW their research will be portrayed.*

The EvidenceNetwork.ca currently has 78 expert advisors from across Canada providing content for EvidenceNetwork.ca. Reach is monitored on a monthly basis using Internet analytics and social media analysis tools.

## Does it work?

The media products (fig 1) are promoted by leveraging a variety of social media tools including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest and LinkedIn. (e.g. an OpEd examining two-tiered health systems was shared over 8,000 times on Facebook with a viewership reach of more than **2.7 million people**). Also as proof of mainstream media's ever growing receptivity to OpEds, publication in Canada's top seven media outlets has dramatically increased over the years (fig 2) garnering national attention. In addition, EvidenceNetwork's website itself, which houses all media products, reaches a global audience (fig 3).



Figure 1. Media products from a series on Poverty in 2015, including a backgrounder (for journalists), OpEd and infographic. OpEd for the public not shown here.

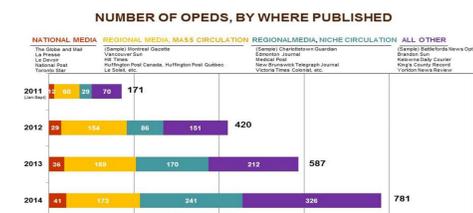


Figure 2. The uptake of EvidenceNetwork's op-eds has consistently increased since inception in 2011.

## What is the Impact of translating evidence through the media?

As a result of the publication of OpEds through EvidenceNetwork.ca, our experts have been invited to: give testimony at court hearings; provide evidence at government proceedings; give presentations to royal commissions; and share their findings at international conferences. Here are a few examples:

Expert Advisor, Marni Brownell: *Her OpEd led to an invitation to testify before the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry into Child Maltreatment. The judge's recommendations reflected OpEd material and testimony.*

Expert Advisor, Michael Law: Alberta's Minister of Health wrote: *"Dr. Law's assistance in analysis of the impact of generic drug pricing changes and in communicating that information to my office and to the public through availability to the media greatly assisted in providing more evidence-informed public debate."*

Eric Hoskins, Ontario's Minister of Health wrote a 2014 *Globe and Mail* OpEd supporting a national pharmacare program, quoting and providing links to an EvidenceNetwork.ca OpEd.

## Supporting an ongoing dialogue

Since its inception, EvidenceNetwork.ca has worked to create an ongoing dialogue between Canada's academic health policy researchers and journalists in order to enrich the quality and quantity of health policy stories in the Canadian media. In **engaging the mode of knowledge dissemination** (i.e. journalists and media specialists) in order to ensure an **understanding** of both the ever-changing **barriers and facilitators** when it comes to a continually **shifting** media landscape (e.g. traditional print and broadcast media making way for new online media; decrease in health policy reporters; reduction of word counts; changing conceptualizations of newsworthiness based on corporatization of media; fluctuating policy focus; etc.) EvidenceNetwork.ca has been able to help health policy researchers get the best evidence in to the hands of policy makers and healthcare consumers alike.

## Take Away Messages

EvidenceNetwork.ca helps to bridge the gap between researchers and journalists to ensure that the latest research and evidence around important health policy issues leads to **improved patient outcomes, enhanced patient experiences and improved access to care for all Canadians**. Focused and targeted communication with the media, with the guidance and expertise of an established knowledge translation network, can help bring evidence to life in a way that promotes conversation and health systems change.

## References

- Faulkner A, Mills N, Bainton D, Baxter K, Kinnersley P, Peters TJ, & Sharp, D. (2003). A systematic review of the effect of primary care-based service innovations and patterns of referral to specialist secondary care. *The British Journal of General Practices*, 53 (496): 878-84.
- Grilli R, Ramsay C, & Minozzi S. (2002). Mass media interventions: effects on health services utilization. Cochrane Database of systematic Reviews. 1:CD000389.
- Comino EJ, Davies GP, Krastev Y, Haas M, Christl B, Furler J, Raymont A, & Harris MF. (2012). A systematic review of interventions to enhance access to best practice primary health care for chronic disease management, prevention and episodic care. *BMC Health Services Research*, 12: 415.
- Ranji SR, Steinman MA, Shojania KG, Gonzales R. (2008). Interventions to reduce unnecessary antibiotic prescribing: a systematic review and quantitative analysis. *Medical Care*, 46(8): 847-62.
- Haynes RB, Davis DA, McKibbon A, & Tugwell P. (1984) A critical appraisal of the efficacy of continuing medical education. *JAMA* 251 (1):61-4.
- Rainie L, Funk C, Anderson M. (2015). *How Scientists Engage the Public*. PEW Research Centre.

## Acknowledgments

EvidenceNetwork.ca acknowledges generous support from the CIHR (PHSI), Research Manitoba, and the Centre for Healthcare Innovation. Thank you to Leah Crockett for assistance with this poster.