

Tools to assist in evaluation of municipal public health and wellbeing plans

Module 6 of 7: Making evaluation sustainable



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Introduction

The purpose of this module is to assist in more effectively embedding Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) evaluation into standard planning practice in ways that are affordable and sustainable.

The module is one of a suite of seven resources entitled **Tools to assist in the evaluation of MPHWP**s designed to provide evaluation support and guidance to practitioners involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of MPHWP as required under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. See **Module 1: MPHWP evaluation at a glance** for more information.

The following table describes each module and its use against MPHWP evaluation actions¹.

Table 1: Alignment of Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWPs modules with evaluation actions

MPHWP evaluation action	Tools to assist in evaluation of MPHWPs modules
Understanding MPHWP evaluation	Use Module 1: MPHWP evaluation at a glance to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the legislative requirements for MPHWP evaluation under the <i>Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008</i>. • understand the multilayered approach applied to MPHWP evaluation applied in this resource.
Develop an MPHWP evaluation strategy	Use Module 2: Building an MPHWP evaluation strategy to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • establish the governance mechanisms for MPHWP evaluation • clarify how each evaluation question will be approached and what will be evaluated • establish systems to coordinate evaluation elements • design summary MPHWP evaluation reporting
Determine role of internal partners, external partners and the community	Use Module 3: Achieving a culture of evaluation to develop internal relationships that promote MPHWP evaluation across council
	Use Module 4: Evaluating with partners to work with external partners to include assisting in the design and conduct of MPHWP evaluation in their MPHWP roles
	Use Module 5: Engaging the community in evaluation to engage the community more effectively in the design and conduct of MPHWP evaluation
Design systems to support the evaluation strategy	Use Module 6: Making evaluation sustainable to develop approaches to the design and conduct of MPHWP evaluation that are sustainable
Conduct MPHWP evaluation	Use Module 1 to guide how answers to evaluation questions will be brought together, analysed and reported Use Modules 3, 4,5 to guide the way in which internal partners, external partners and the community are engaged in the conduct of evaluation Use Module 7: Designing and conducting an evaluation to design and conduct an evaluation of selected MPHWP topics or to support someone else to do so

You are here

¹ Victorian Department of Health, 2013, *Guide to municipal public health planning*, DH, Melbourne.

PART 1: The essentials of making evaluation sustainable

The aim of making MPHWP evaluation sustainable is that it becomes a standard part of the lifecycle of policy, program and initiative development. This means that evaluation becomes a routine part of MPHWP planning and implementation - not an optional extra, but a core practice.

Finding the resources to undertake evaluation can sometimes be a challenge. Gaining leadership and senior management support that sees evaluation as central to improvement and change can go a long way towards releasing the necessary funds and staff time. Early planning for evaluation can allow for indicators and data collection systems to be built into the front end and can avoid the more costly option of retrofitted evaluation methods.

Working on evaluation with partners might also open up opportunities to tap into other sources of funding, share available resources and avoid duplication.

In addition, making evaluation sustainable will also rely on how available resources are applied. This means selecting what to evaluate, choosing cost effective evaluation methods and gaining value from money from evaluation findings.

It is important to remember that evaluation is an investment – it allows decisions to be made about what works and what doesn't - directing funds with better effect.

1.1 Attributes of sustainable evaluation

A useful way to consider sustainable evaluation is to explore its attributes. Preskill and Boyle, 2008 ² have developed a comprehensive model of evaluation capacity building which addresses three organisational layers: learning capacity (leadership, culture, systems and structures, and communication); evaluation knowledge, skills and attitudes; and sustainable evaluation practice. They suggest that:

*Sustainable evaluation practice is dependent on the ability to take a holistic, proactive and conscious approach to evaluation.*³

For MPHWP evaluation to become sustainable it can be expected to display the following eight attributes of sustainable evaluation practice:

Evaluation approaches and processes

Explicit evaluation approaches and processes, such as those described throughout ***Tools to assist in the evaluation of MPHWP***, guide evaluation practice and make evaluation more accessible to all those who are interested or are required (under legislation or due to funding requirements) to undertake evaluation. It is important that evaluation practice achieves required standards of quality and ethical behaviour and is clear and easy to follow.

² Preskill H & Boyle S 2008, *A Multidisciplinary Model of Evaluation Capacity Building*, American Journal of Evaluation, Volume 29 Number 4, December 2008, pp443-459

³ Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 454

Strategic plan for evaluation	Module 2: Building an MPHWP evaluation strategy sets out a simple, clear, accessible process for developing your MPHWP Evaluation Strategy. The approach provides methods for you to make both strategic and tactical decisions and to share the evaluation processes with stakeholders internally and externally. The MPHWP Evaluation Strategy is the foundation of making evaluation of MPHWP's doable, useful, practical and ethical.
Evaluation policies and procedures	Policies and procedures provide the structures and means by which evaluation becomes institutionalised in an organisation. A policy will contain the organisational context and the policy statement itself, including objectives, audience and applicability, policy requirements, roles and responsibilities, and monitoring and reporting requirements against the policy.
Shared evaluation beliefs and commitment	Values and beliefs about evaluation underpin its sustainability. In Module 3: Achieving a culture of evaluation leaders are acknowledged as critical to sponsoring the value of evaluation and encouraging evaluation practice, while staff participation in a learning environment that is open-minded, committed to finding things out and appreciative of the differing perspectives of stakeholders and the community allows the organisation to capitalise on its investment in evaluation. In these organisations, there are continuous discussions about evaluation and its contribution to policy, programs, processes, systems and structures.
Use of evaluation findings	Using your evaluation findings for decision-making and action is essential to attracting further support for evaluation within an organisation. The findings are also important across the health and wellbeing service system – to partners and to the community. Communicating the results in accessible ways, and celebrating successes, help to make evaluation a valued activity. As Preskill & Boyle explain: <i>As evaluation findings are used to improve programs and make important decisions, it is likely that evaluation will become more embedded in the organization's culture.</i> ⁴
Integrated knowledge management evaluation system	It is important that evaluation is not person-dependent or even 'department-dependent'. In evaluating the MPHWP, it is vital that the results of evaluation are captured and stored in accessible systems that are aligned with other reporting systems and preferably integrated with them. The transparency of reporting systems throws important light on the value of evaluation to all in the organisation.

⁴ Preskill & Boyle, 2008, p. 455

Continuous learning about evaluation

Embedding evaluation practice in personal and professional development processes is a key contributor to sustainability. Training and development, performance management processes, project planning and policy compliance all support continuing evaluation practice. The regular communication of results engenders continuing further enquiry.

Resources dedicated to evaluation

Evaluation needs financial, human and material resources. These might be 'above-the-line' financial resources that is, specifically earmarked for evaluation or 'below-the-line' resources, where in-kind or other financial resources are made available for example, by sharing costs with partners or engaging the community in evaluation practice. Participatory evaluation can be a cost-effective and rewarding way of including the community in evaluation processes.

PART 2: Sustaining MPHWP evaluation

Achieving the attributes of evaluation sustainability depends on a number of factors including:

- ❖ gaining organisational support for evaluation
- ❖ setting realistic evaluation goals
- ❖ attracting evaluation resources.
- ❖ pursuing cost effective evaluation

These factors are strongly interconnected, for example, attracting resources is more likely with high level organisational support and support is more likely when goals are realistic and methods are cost effective. Similarly, the level of available resources provides a clear parameter for setting realistic goals and a driver for cost effective evaluation.

2.1 Support for evaluation

For evaluation to become sustainable, it is essential that an organisation owns the process – that senior management in particular is committed to it and embraces it as a key contributor to future planning, decision-making and problem solving. In an 'evaluation-friendly' organisation, evaluation is an integral part of the organisation's everyday operations.

To a large extent gaining support for evaluation in this way is the subject of **Module 3: Achieving a culture of evaluation.**

Lending support or advocating for the development of a whole of council evaluation policy provides an avenue for strengthening evaluation as a key influence on your work. Such a policy will address issues of accountability – for what and to whom – and learning, linking other organisational learning and development and knowledge management approaches.

In practical terms, gaining support for evaluation needs to translate into leadership, management, resources and technical support that will ensure MPHWP evaluation occurs as a regular and sustainable process.

2.2 Realistic evaluation goals

It is unrealistic to evaluate every aspect of MPHWP activity. The development of an MPHWP Evaluation Strategy provides the foundation for sustainable evaluation by promoting a pragmatic approach to MPHWP evaluation. It does this by breaking MPHWP evaluation into manageable components using the key evaluation questions and by directing evaluation effort towards high risk or otherwise strategically critical aspects.

This approach can make it clearer what evaluation goals you need to resource and can assist you in balancing your evaluation demands with available resources. This will ensure that your final MPHWP Evaluation Strategy is logically feasible, useful and realistic.

Answering MPHWP evaluation questions can be tackled with a view to sustainability and affordability.

Table 2: Answering the MPHWP evaluation questions sustainably

Evaluation Question	Sustainability action
<p>Have we achieved the change we sought?</p> <p>Council will compare information used to identify need in the municipal scan stage with most recent information for each stated goal, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting health and wellbeing indicators in the MPHWP planning stage • considering progress of selected indicators • using indicator information to identify priorities and goals of next MPHWP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select health and wellbeing indicators (in the planning stage) that are credible and are meaningful to stakeholders. People are more likely to support and invest in indicators that they trust and that provide useful insights into important topics. • Select health and wellbeing indicators that are affordable to initiate and maintain. Keeping the number of health and wellbeing indicators to a manageable number will help. • Look to secondary sources of data, that is, information generated by other parties, regarding the health and wellbeing of the community and the social determinants of health. This is usually far less expensive than conducting community surveys in house. See <i>Guide to municipal public health and wellbeing planning⁵ for sources</i>. Other examples include sources such as Victorian Public Health Survey, local Community Health Services, or VicRoads (for road safety data). • Use data generated by organisations whose core business is information (for example ABS or Community Indicators Victoria) is also likely to result in more sustainable information that is subject to continuous improvement. • Use data generated by existing council operations, for example, service usage, debt collection for rates or complaints systems. Find out what you already collect.

⁵ Victorian Department of Health, 2013, pp 22-24.

[http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/\\$FILE/1209008_guide_mphwp_WEB-v02.pdf](http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/AABF8E86DC916DFECA257AF2007CAA46/$FILE/1209008_guide_mphwp_WEB-v02.pdf)

Evaluation Question	Sustainability action
<p>Are we having the influence we expected?</p> <p>Council will work with partners to evaluate key policies, programs or activities in appropriate depth based on available resources, assessed risks and opportunities. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting key policies, programs or activities to evaluate • designing and undertaking or supporting selected evaluations • using the findings of selected evaluations to inform action for subsequent MPHWP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select evaluations based on the balance of risk and strategic importance to the council. This will ensure evaluation resources are directed towards the most critical topics. It can also ensure evaluation activity is supported and the results are awaited with interest. • Work with partners to identify whether they are evaluating the same or complementary priority areas. Actively seek opportunities to share data and/or analysis – and consider joint funding. • Consider cost effective evaluation options, for example, commission shorter, smarter reports that provide crisp, clear interpretations of the information and clear achievable pointers for action. (see <i>Cost effective evaluation</i> below) • Wherever possible, time evaluations to feed directly into planning or budgeting processes. This strengthens their relevance and influence. • Use the results again and again, fully capitalising on your investment of resources and deriving full value from the evaluation.
<p>Have we done what we said we would do?</p> <p>Council will collate regular reports on the progress of all MPHWP strategies using routine systems This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • systems design and implementation • routine reporting • using the findings to check progress of MPHWP implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest effort in regular reporting. This helps to embed an expectation that information should guide decision-making and can stimulate deeper questions about influence and achievement of goals. • Align or preferably integrate MPHWP reports with other whole of council reporting • Advocate for and support reporting systems that make whole of council reporting as straightforward as possible • If you need to develop separate MPHWP reporting systems make them practical to complete and easy to interpret

Evaluation Question	Sustainability action
<p><i>How effective is the way we plan?</i></p> <p>Council will evaluate key aspects of MPHWP planning against key planning principles based on available resources, assessed risks and opportunities. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting aspects of MPHWP planning to evaluate • designing and undertaking selected evaluations • using the findings of selected evaluations to inform subsequent MPHWP planning practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select evaluations based on the strategic importance to the council. This will ensure evaluation resources are directed towards the most critical topics. It can also ensure evaluation activity is supported and the results are awaited with interest. • Consider cost effective evaluation options, for example, using existing mechanisms, such as your MPHWP advisory group, as key informants. (see 2.4 Cost effective evaluations below) • Time evaluations to feed directly into planning processes. This maximises their usefulness.

2.3 Attracting evaluation resources

A key element of ensuring evaluation of the MPHWP is sustainable within your council is ensuring that you have the necessary resources to invest in your MPHWP Evaluation Strategy. Gaining support for evaluation will make this task easier - there is no doubt that resources are more likely to be found for things that matter most to an organisation.

Developing your MPHWP Evaluation Strategy will most likely involve a preliminary process of identifying what you regard as the most important MPHWP activities to evaluate and a refining process of making some practical decisions about what can remain in the MPHWP Evaluation Strategy based on what resources are available.

If you can be clear about the level of effort required to satisfy your preliminary analysis it will be much easier to put your case for resources. Your analysis will enable you to demonstrate your approach to MPHWP evaluation as a whole, as well as the reasons behind your selection of topics for evaluation, for example, the limited availability of evidence, the level of risk and/or the degree of innovation.

This bid for resources is best done if it can be synchronised with whole of council planning and budget cycles. Bear in mind in your preliminary analysis you will have spread evaluation across the four year cycle of the MPHWP and therefore your resource requirements will spread across the same timeframe.

Find out when the budget processes operate and/or how you can propose expenditure on MPHWP evaluation. This might be very early when the MPHWP development process is being considered or it might be later in subsequent years. Either way it is important to be prepared to make a bid for evaluation resources when the opportunities arise. All too often, evaluation of the MPHWP is an afterthought that is conducted outside council resource allocation processes and is therefore at a disadvantage from the outset.

Similar opportunities can be pursued in funding submissions to bodies outside council. Including evaluation as part of your initial funding submission recognises evaluation from the outset, allowing for better planning and appropriate funding of the evaluation.

Partnerships can also provide additional resources for evaluation. MPHWP partners access different funding streams and submit to different reporting requirements, including evaluation. By pooling resources across the community health and wellbeing system, there can be increased benefit to the knowledge base, to the community and to sustainability.

When partners collaborate, they enhance the capacity of the other partner for mutual benefit and a common purpose. Evaluation is a critical element in advancing common purpose. **Module 4: Evaluating with partners** explores how you can conduct your evaluations with stakeholders.

2.4 Cost effective evaluation

There are a number of ways in which evaluations can be approached that are cost effective and which ensure value for money. This will be particularly critical where resources are limited.

Nonetheless, it will be important to make sure that evaluation objectives and ethical practice are not compromised in choosing less costly options. Whether you are conducting or commissioning an evaluation it will be useful to seek expert advice on methodologies to check they provide sufficient rigour and/or to make adjustments that will compensate for any limitations. This will ensure your affordable methodologies do not threaten evaluation validity - you do not want to invest in results that cannot be relied upon.

The following are suggestions for creating affordable evaluations.

Narrow the evaluation scope	<p>Try to be realistic about what the information will be used for.</p> <p>It can be tempting to want to answer all possible questions about a policy, program or initiative when it might be more practical to focus on areas where you can make the most useful decisions. For example, if it has not been running long enough to consider long term benefits, then you might still be making decisions about how it operates and focus on process evaluation only.</p> <p>Reflect this narrower focus in your stated evaluation purpose (See Module 7: Designing and conducting an evaluation)</p>
Choose a methodology suited to the evaluation scope	<p>Your choice of methodology will be determined by the evaluation purpose. Some types of evaluation are particularly suited to a deliberately narrow focus. For example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Rapid Assessment</i> can be used as a quick check to determine whether objectives appear on track and whether more in depth analysis is warranted• <i>Action Research</i> can be used to target specific evaluation questions that build on the body of knowledge and can inform decisions on the run.

<p>Reduce data collection costs</p>	<p>Data collection and data entry can also be costly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use secondary data wherever possible – so long as it is credible, reliable and affordable • Redesign project or service records to make data collection and analysis simpler. Incorporate indicators if possible. • Clarify the sample sizes you need? (A larger sample does not necessarily improve validity but can cost more.) • Deploy self-administered questionnaires and/or reduce the length or complexity of survey instruments. • Engage students and/or community members to conduct interviews or other data collection tasks. • Reconsider investing in baseline data where you can rely on sources of historical data (secondary or internal), informant recall or participatory processes such as focus groups.
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Use the **Sustainable evaluation tool** to consider action that can be taken to approach each evaluation question sustainably- see **page 13**.

PART 3: Further resources

The following is a list of useful resources in addition to those cited in the body of this module. All web based material was last accessed 20 September 2013.

ALARA – The Action Learning, Action Research Association is a strategic network of people interested in using action research and action learning. Their site includes information, publications and networks.

Visit: <http://www.alara.net.au/public/home>

Bamberger, M., Rugh J., Church M. and Fort L., 2004, Shoestring Evaluation: Designing Impact Evaluations under Budget, Time and Data Constraints. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 25: 5-37

Brown D.R et al, 2008, Participatory Action Research Pilot Study of Urban Health Disparities Using Rapid Assessment Response and Evaluation, *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol 98, No. 1

McNall, M., Foster-Fishman, P.G., 2007, Methods of Rapid Evaluation, Assessment, and Appraisal. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 28 (2), 151-168

Morin, S., Maiorana, A., Koester, K., Sheon, N., Richards, A., 2003, Community Consultation in HIV Prevention Research: A Study of Community Advisory Boards at 6 Research Sites. *Journal AIDS*, 33, 513-520

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Evaluation Question	Think about...	Action (See Table 2 for some ideas)
<p>Have we achieved the change we sought?</p> <p>Council will compare information used to identify need in the municipal scan stage with most recent information for each stated goal, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting health and wellbeing indicators in the MPHWP planning stage • considering progress of selected indicators • using indicator information to identify priorities and goals of next MPHWP. 	<p>Context – buy-in</p> <p>How well are indicators understood and accepted?</p> <p>How can this be improved?</p>	
	<p>Resources – money and time</p> <p>How can costs be kept affordable?</p>	
	<p>Importance – future focus</p> <p>How critical are indicators in driving accountability and learning?</p> <p>What do you need from indicators to improve planning?</p>	

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Evaluation Question	Think about...	Action (See Table 2 for some ideas)
<p>Are we having the influence we expected?</p> <p>Council will work with partners to evaluate key policies, programs or activities in appropriate depth based on available resources, assessed risks and opportunities. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting key policies, programs or activities to evaluate • designing and undertaking or supporting selected evaluations • using the findings of selected evaluations to inform action for subsequent MPHWP. 	<p>Context – buy-in</p> <p>How does evaluation inform planning and decision-making? How can this be improved?</p>	
	<p>Resources – money and time</p> <p>How are funding decisions for evaluation made? How can evaluation costs be kept affordable?</p>	
	<p>Importance – future focus</p> <p>How can evaluations be used to best effect?</p>	

Evaluation Question	Think about...	Action (See Table 2 for some ideas)
<p>Have we done what we said we would do?</p> <p>Council will collate regular reports on the progress of all MPHWP strategies using routine systems This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • systems design and implementation • routine reporting • using the findings to check progress of MPHWP implementation. 	<p>Context – buy-in</p> <p>How does evaluation align with routine reporting?</p> <p>How can this be improved?</p>	
	<p>Resources – money and time</p> <p>How can evaluation system costs be kept affordable?</p>	
	<p>Importance – future focus</p> <p>How can routine reports support MPHWP evaluation?</p>	

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Evaluation Question	Think about...	Action (See Table 1 for some ideas)
<p>How effective is the way we plan?</p> <p>Council will evaluate key aspects of MPHWP planning against key planning principles based on available resources, assessed risks and opportunities. This will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selecting aspects of MPHWP planning or critical enablers to evaluate • designing and undertaking selected evaluations • using the findings of selected evaluations to inform subsequent MPHWP planning practice. 	<p>Context – buy-in</p> <p>How does MPHWP practice align with whole of council planning practice? How can this be improved?</p>	
	<p>Resources – money and time</p> <p>How can evaluation costs be kept affordable?</p>	
	<p>Importance – future focus</p> <p>What are critical areas for evaluation capacity building?</p>	

