Monitoring and Evaluation of Community Based Worker Programs

Well-designed Community Based Worker (CBW) programs include clearly defined job roles and expectations, careful recruitment, appropriate training, and consistent and ongoing support and supervision.

Who are Community Based Workers?
A CBW is a community member who is employed or contracted to provide a link between the program and the community and/or undertake specific non clinical work.

The value of Community Based Workers
Research demonstrates that CBWs can play an important role in promoting health, preventing disease and improving health outcomes, in both developing and developed countries, especially where health inequalities exist. CBWs can improve access to and coverage of communities with basic health services, can undertake actions that lead to improved health outcomes and can make a valuable contribution to community development.

Monitoring and Evaluation
An important reason for evaluating CBW programs is to determine whether the critical elements required to ensure CBWs are able to do their jobs have been implemented. Are these elements (appropriate recruitment, manageable workloads, good working conditions, suitable training and supportive supervision) enabling CBWs to fulfill their role? How are they contributing to the program outcomes?

Sound practice from the literature
To know whether programs involving CBWs are being implemented as planned and are effective, it is essential to develop ways to monitor and evaluate them. Establishing a systematic and comprehensive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework for a program helps program staff and decision makers move beyond implementation to focus on program effectiveness and outcomes. It helps promote greater transparency and accountability and is a powerful learning tool. It builds knowledge of what really works, what does not work and why. Building and sustaining an effective M&E system “requires continuous commitment, champions, time, effort and resources” (Kusak and Rist, 2004, p 163).

Developing an effective M&E system is a participatory process that involves program stakeholders at each step of the way. In a cross-cultural setting, any evaluation activity needs to involve team members who understand the context and who can approve, guide, direct and implement the activity to ensure culturally appropriate, meaningful and useful findings (Stockdill et al, 2002; Suarez-Balcazar et al, 2010). Regardless of whether a health communication, education or promotion activity sits within a broad program or constitutes a ‘one-off’ project, finding a suitable method of demonstrating effectiveness is an essential part of the process (Menzies School of Health Research, 2014).
What is monitoring?
Program monitoring is the systematic and continuous collection of information related to implementing a project that can show whether it is functioning as intended. Project staff are primarily responsible for collecting monitoring information.

What is evaluation?
Evaluation is a process of looking at a program or project to determine its merit, worth and value (Scriven, 1991). Evaluating progress made towards achieving goals can show what has gone well and what has changed and can identify areas for improvement. Rather than think of the evaluation as something done at the end of a session or program, assessment needs to be viewed as ‘part and parcel’ of all activities, ideally situated within practices that support best practice and continuous quality improvement.

Information sheet 7.1 provides an example of how The Fred Hollows Foundation’s Indigenous Australia Program (IAP) established a systematic Monitoring and Evaluation Framework as an integral part of the its Trachoma Elimination Program (TEP).

Information sheet 7.2 presents a range of participatory methods and tools useful for monitoring and evaluation in a cross-cultural context.

Cultural Protocol for Evaluation - A guide to support and encourage good practice in cross-cultural evaluation

The IAP has developed a cultural protocol for evaluation. This guide was developed for those who are involved with evaluation-related activities with IAP. The purpose is to assist internal staff and external evaluation consultants to ensure that activities are undertaken with the appropriate respect for, and participation of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities. This protocol was developed incorporating internal staff knowledge and experience, as well as Australian and international evaluation and research approaches to working with communities.

This resource can be downloaded at http://betterevaluation.org/resource/tool/a_cultural_protocol_for_evaluation

The protocol presents IAP’s perspectives on important elements of cross-cultural evaluation. We believe our thinking and synthesis will help many others working cross-culturally.

There are three elements to the Cultural Protocol for Evaluation:

1. Reciprocal Respect
2. Cultural Humility
3. Acknowledgement

The three elements complement each other.

References and resources


