

Swiss Learning
Health System

Report on Stakeholder Dialogue

Evidence use in health policymaking – learning from the global
and local level

Aron Baumann

Keywords

Evidence use, policymaking, science, research

Authors

Aron Baumann, MSc, PhD student – Swiss Centre for International Health, University, Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, Basel, Switzerland

Address for correspondence

Aron Baumann
Swiss Centre for International Health
Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute
Socinstrasse 57
4051 Basel
E-Mail: aron.baumann@swisstph.ch

Suggested citation

The text of this stakeholder dialogue summary may be freely quoted and printed, provided proper acknowledgement is given.

Baumann, A. (2020). Evidence use in health policymaking – learning from the global and local level. Swiss Learning Health System.
https://www.slhs.ch/images/learning-cycles/topics/2020-Baumann/SD_Policy_final1.pdf

Table of Contents

Keywords	2
Authors	2
Suggested citation	2
Policy Briefs and Stakeholder Dialogues of the Swiss Learning Health System.....	5
Context of stakeholder dialogue.....	6
Initiative	6
Topic	6
Rationale	6
Objectives	6
Conduct of stakeholder dialogue.....	8
Venue.....	8
Input presentations.....	8
Participants	8
Policy brief.....	9
Synthesis of stakeholder dialogue	10
Research landscape on evidence use in policymaking	10
Science and policy – two communities.....	10
How to bring science and policy together?.....	11
Annex	12
Slides input presentation 1	12
Slides input presentation 2	16
Slides input presentation 3	23

Policy Briefs and Stakeholder Dialogues of the Swiss Learning Health System

The Swiss Learning Health System (SLHS) was established as a nationwide project in 2017. One of its most important objectives is to bridge research, policy, and practice. For this, an infrastructure supporting learning cycles will be provided. Learning cycles enable the ongoing integration of evidence into policy and practice by:

- continuously identifying issues and questions that are relevant to the health system,
- summarizing and providing relevant evidence from research, and
- presenting potential suggested solutions and courses of action.

Key features of the learning cycles in the SLHS include the development of policy briefs that serve as a basis for stakeholder dialogues. Issues or questions that are identified to be further pursued are monitored for potential implementation and eventually evaluated to inform new learning cycles and to support continuous learning within the system.

A policy brief describes the respective issue or respective question by explaining the relevant contextual factors and describing a number of (evidence-based) suggested solutions or recommendations. For every suggested solution or recommendation, the policy brief explains relevant aspects and potential barriers and facilitators to their implementation.

During a stakeholder dialogue, a group of stakeholders discusses the issue or the question, the proposed recommendations, and possible barriers and facilitators presented in the policy brief. The aim is for all stakeholders to develop a common understanding of the issue and collaboratively discuss and compile potential courses of action for the solution of the issue.

Context of stakeholder dialogue

This report describes the background of and summarizes the content discussed at the stakeholder dialogue “Evidence use in health policymaking – learning from the global and local level” that was organized and conducted within the Swiss Learning Health System (SLHS) initiative in September 2020. The following paragraphs describe the background and the context of the dialogue.

Initiative

The stakeholder dialogue was initiated within the SLHS, which is a collaborative national platform for health systems and services research, policy and practice. The goal of the SLHS is to foster the dialogue between health system stakeholders with the aim of developing and continuously integrating evidence-informed solutions to current and future challenges in the Swiss health system. The SLHS uses different mechanisms to achieve this goal, including the development and provision of evidence syntheses (policy briefs) and the implementation of stakeholder dialogues.

Topic

The stakeholder dialogue summarized in this report was concerned with the topic of evidence use in health policymaking and the question of what can be learned from global and local research about how evidence is used and what can be done to support its use in policy.

Rationale

To strengthen health systems and to enhance population health efficiently and cost-effective, research evidence should be considered in the making of policies. However, policy decisions are often influenced by a wide range of factors, among them the political context. Some of these factors are likely to be of more immediate relevance to policymakers than research evidence. Moreover, research evidence might not always be suited for the local context and can be difficult to access or apply. To understand how we can promote and support evidence-informed health policies within these boundaries, we can draw on a substantial body of global and local research and experiences from policy and practice. Moreover, initiatives such as the SLHS can help to integrate evidence into holistic solutions addressing local health system challenges.

Objectives

The aim of the stakeholder dialogue was to foster the reflection on how evidence is used and how its use can be strengthened in Swiss and global policies. To do so, the dialogue drew on global and local research findings and the experience from policy and practice. The main objectives were:

- To illustrate research findings on how evidence is used in policymaking – globally and in Switzerland

- To offer insights on opportunities and limitations of evidence use from the perspective of practice
- To provide a platform to discuss how evidence use can be strengthened in Switzerland

Conduct of stakeholder dialogue

The following paragraphs describe where and how the stakeholder dialogue was realised and who participated in it.

Venue

The stakeholder dialogue was held virtually at the Swiss Public Health Conference 2020 on September 3rd. The conference, which takes place annually, was organized by the Swiss Society for Public Health and the Swiss School of Public Health (SSPH+) and was hosted by the Department of Health Sciences & Medicine of the University of Lucerne. The conference was concerned with the topic “From Evidence to Public Health Policy and Practice”.

Input presentations

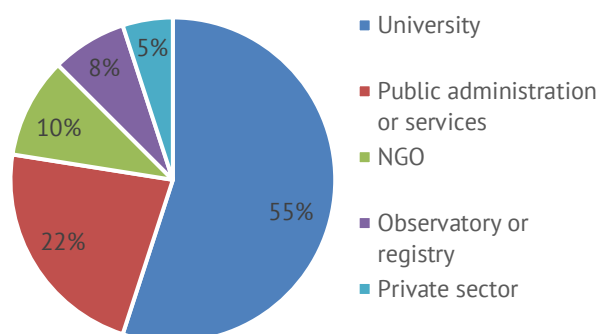
To serve the objectives of the stakeholder dialogue, three input presentations were held that covered the theoretical and practical aspects of evidence use from the perspective of research and policy (see the Annex of this report for more details):

- Aron Baumann, Swiss Centre of International Health, Swiss TPH: Evidence use in health policymaking – insights from a «Swiss Learning Health System» project
- Prof. Andreas Balthasar, University of Lucerne and Founder of Interface: Science speaks to power: from theory to practice
- Kathrin Huber, MPH, Deputy Secretary-General, Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Public Health (CDS / GDK): Why evidence sometimes does (not) matter - insights from practice

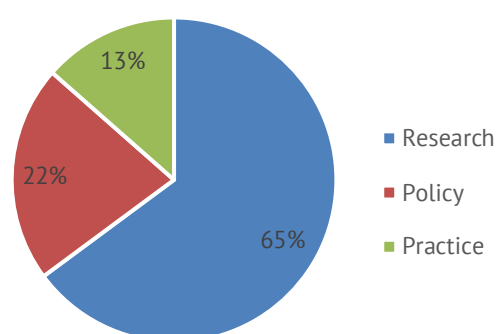
Participants

A total of 42 participants took part (see graphs below for details). Participants were from various organizations (universities, public administrations or services, NGOs, observatories or registries, private sector) and from several Swiss cantons. Participants from public administrations were from both, the federal and the cantonal level. Most participants were

Participants' organizational affiliation



Participant classification



considered to be researchers, but there was a considerable number of participants that mostly worked on policies or in practice.

Policy brief

The stakeholder dialogue made use of the accompanying SLHS [policy brief](#) on “Effective interventions to strengthen capacity for evidence-informed policymaking in Swiss health authorities” that was offered to all participants. In particular, the policy brief was requested by participants from practice (health promotion), research (universities) and governmental research bodies (health observatory).

Synthesis of stakeholder dialogue

In this chapter, a synthesis of the content discussed at the stakeholder dialogue is provided, in particular, what is known about the current research on evidence use in policymaking, how the science world and the policymaking world generally differ and what can be done to enhance the use of evidence in policymaking.

Research landscape on evidence use in policymaking

The field of research on evidence use in policymaking is not new but increasingly gaining popularity and thus, most literature on the topic has been published in the last couple of years. Although the field of research is diverse, the knowledge about evidence use in policymaking is mainly based on research that focused on a couple of countries, i.e. the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia. These countries have not only dominated the research landscape but continue to be the reference for many initiatives that aim to foster the use of evidence in policymaking. However, there is a growing number of studies that focus on low- and middle income countries and these will be helpful to expand the knowledge on contextual factors influencing evidence use in policymaking. On the methodological side, there are still few observational studies that investigate the actual use of evidence in practice. Most research approaches take a rather indirect approach and gather data by using interviews or focus group discussions.

Over the last two decades, a more realistic picture of evidence use has emerged, that acknowledges the complexity of policy processes and deviates from linear models of direct evidence application by policymakers. Alongside this finding, the notion of evidence hierarchies – a concept overtaken from clinical research – has been adapted towards contextual policy needs allowing a different conceptualization of what constitutes good evidence. Similarly, the focus on research evidence (i.e. academic research products) was broadened and it is now recognized that in practice research evidence is and must often be combined with other forms of knowledge. Finally, the current body of research clearly indicates that relationships between policymakers and researchers are key to support the use of evidence in policy (see accompanying [policy brief](#) for other factors to foster evidence use).

Science and policy – two communities

The worlds of policymaking and science are based on essential differences. Science aims to reliably deliver facts by using standardized methods. As such, science strives to explain and understand phenomena independently and impartially. Policymaking, on the other hand, follows rules and mechanisms that can heavily deviate from rational and transparent decision-making. Policy decisions may be driven by values and emotions, vague or changing objectives. Rather than developing solutions for identified problems, policymakers might generate problems to justify pre-existing solutions. Policymakers themselves face bounded rationality, meaning that they rely on heuristics and other methods to deal with selective and overwhelming information and limited available time when making decisions. Instead of being impartial and independent, policymakers depend on other actors with often contradicting objectives. Policy solutions are thus developed pragmatically and are based on compromises and acceptance.

As policymaking frequently involves dynamic and complex processes, evidence enters the policy process at various stages and in different ways. It is always just one of many determinants in the making of policies. Other elements such as (ideological) values, the political acceptance of policy options, budget limitations, the enforceability of policy solutions, the legal framework, interests of political parties and the process of deliberation impact how far evidence is and can be used. Consequentially, the potential relevance of evidence varies from topic to topic, is highly influenced by contextual factors and has to be considered in proportion to practical policy needs. When relevant evidence is available, it is not only the capacity and willingness of policymakers to use the evidence, but also the resources to access it, the available time resources and the applicability to local conditions that impact the role evidence has in policy processes.

How to bring science and policy together?



One approach of bringing these two communities together is to invest in the capacity of scientists to understand and interact with policy. This means that researchers have to comprehend the logic and language of policymaking. To bring in their research results, they must be aware of the current political agenda. Scientists need to be able to communicate evidence in a suitable language and appropriate format. For example, policy briefs have been shown to be useful for policymakers, but they should address a practical policy question and they need to be short, concise and written in simple language in order to be used. The Swiss Programme for Research on Global Issues for Development (r4d programme) of the Swiss National Science Foundation, for example, provides content tailored for policymakers, including videos and policy briefs, to foster the translation of knowledge effectively (see <https://www.k4d.ch/category/k4d-for-you/for-policy-makers/>).

Policymakers on the other hand, need to develop an understanding of the research logic and have to learn how to formulate political problems as research questions. Especially public administrations could benefit from investments in professional competence and staff training, as they are the most amenable group of policymakers for the integration of evidence in policies.

Another pillar is to invest in the institutionalization of research use. Such approaches should strive to establish stable relationships that are based on mutual trust. One option for politics and administration to interact directly with science is to establish and involve expert councils. Another possibility is to commission mandates for evidence syntheses or evaluations. Here, interface organizations such as the Swiss Health Observatory have been proven useful. Although these organizations need more time for their responses than the consultation of experts, they can provide sound assessments of the state of research to particular questions. A third way is to support policy-oriented research programs such as the Swiss National Research Programs.

Annex

Slides input presentation 1



Swiss TPH

Evidence use in health policymaking

Insights from a «Swiss Learning Health System» project

Aron Baumann, September 3rd 2020

Mapping qualitative research on evidence use in health policymaking

- Systematic review
- Mapping qualitative evidence base
 - on use of research evidence
 - by policymakers
 - in health policy

13'846
Articles screened

1'070
Full-texts assessed

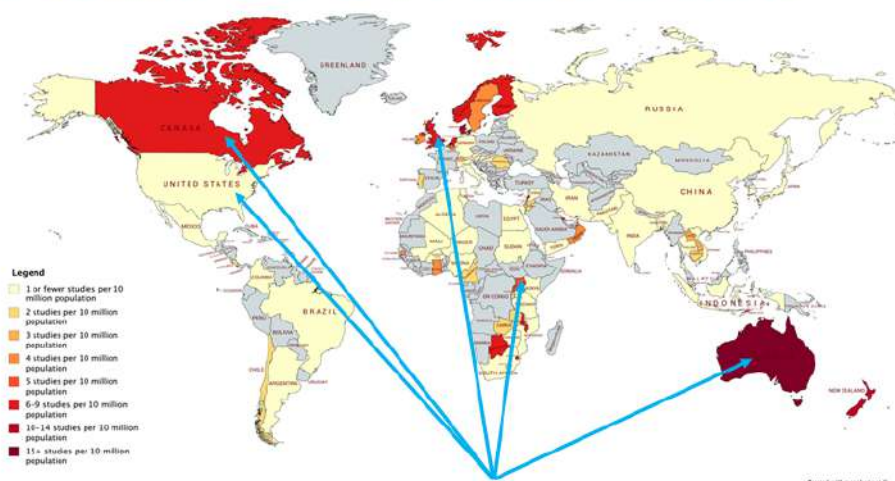
319
Studies included

Verboom B, Baumann A. Mapping the qualitative evidence base on the use of research evidence in health policymaking: A systematic review. *International Journal of Health Policy and Management* (under review)

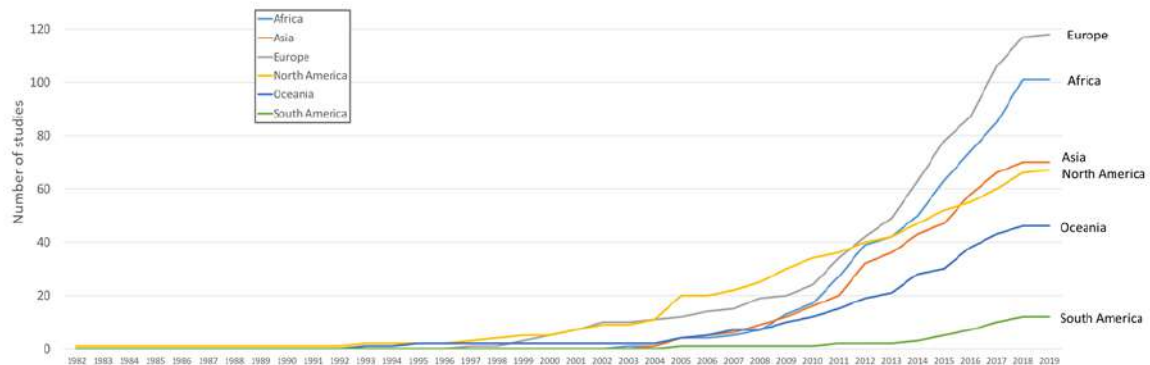
It's a diverse field of research

Main focus of studies (N=319)	%
Cases of policy change or decision-making	28
Use or impact of specific pieces or categories of evidence	15
Perceptions and preferences of policymakers	11
Institutional, political and organizational contexts	11
Methodological and theoretical contributions	8
Researchers, research organizations and other external stakeholders	8
Factors (barriers and facilitators)	7
Interventions to foster evidence use	3
Other categories	7

A few countries dominate the research landscape



Increasing focus on low- and middle income countries



Some other findings

- Focus on barriers and facilitators
- Still few observational studies
- Mostly civil servants and not politicians

Conclusion and insights from the last two decades of research

- Not new, but diverse and growing field of research
- A few countries dominate the research landscape
- More realistic view on the importance of evidence
- Adapted understanding of traditional evidence hierarchies
- Recognition of the need to combine research-based evidence with other forms of knowledge
- Investment to improve supply and dissemination of good evidence
- Importance of relationships between researchers and policymakers

Nutley S, Boaz A, Davies H, Fraser A. New development: What works now? Continuity and change in the use of evidence to improve public policy and service delivery. *Public Money & Management*. 2019;39(4):310-6. 10.1080/09540962.2019.1598202.



Thank you for your attention

aron.baumann@swisstph.ch

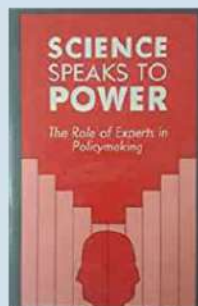
«Science speaks to power: From theory to practice»



PROF. DR. ANDREAS BALTHASAR
SPHC, LUCERNE SEPT, 3RD 2020

UNIVERSITÄT
LUCERNE

Collingridge/Reeve 1986: Science Speaks to Power: The Role of Experts in Policy



«The aim of scientific activity is not only to provide information that is as reliable as possible, but also organized skepticism, doubt and falsification. Scientific results can therefore have only the most marginal influence on policy.»

Collingridge, D.; Reeve, C. 1986: Science Speaks to Power: The Role of Experts in Policy Making. Pinter

We all know the basic principles of science!

Science

- Facts
- Independence
- Impartiality
- Doubts, skepticism, falsification
- Standardized approach
- Reliability
- Explain and understand
- Long-term orientation

But how political decisions are made?

Models of political decisions

1. Rational Choice Theory

Management Decision Making



Axelrod, Robert (1976): Structure of Decision. The cognitive Maps of Political Elites. Princeton.

Models of political decisions

2. «Theory of Muddling-Through»

Lindblom, Charles E. (1959): *The Science Of „Muddling Through“*. In: *Public Administration Review*. Bd. 19.



28.08.2020 SPHC «Science speaks to power: From theory to practice»

Prof. Dr. Andreas Balthasar

5

Models of political decisions

3. «Garbage Can Model»

Cohen, Michael; March, James G.; Olsen, Johan P. (1972): *A Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice*. In: *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Vol. 17, No. 1.



28.08.2020 SPHC «Science speaks to power: From theory to practice»

Prof. Dr. Andreas Balthasar

6

Summary

UNIVERSITÄT
LUZERN

«Policymaking is not, as often assumed, a regular and linear cycle. Knowledge and evidence enter the process at many stages and in dispersed ways. With information overload, interests and even deliberate disinformation, it is unclear where to place trust.»

Sienkiewicz, Marta; Mair, David (2020): Science for Policy Handbook.

28.08.2020 SPHC «Science speaks to power: From theory to practice»

Prof. Dr. Andreas Balthasar

7

Science and policy → two communities

UNIVERSITÄT
LUZERN

Science	Policy
Facts	Values
Independence	Interests
Impartiality	Partiality
Doubts, skepticism, falsification	Security, decisions
Standardized approach	Pragmatism
Reliability	Acceptance
Explain and understand	Act
Long-term orientation	Short-term orientation

28.08.2020 SPHC «Science speaks to power: From theory to practice»

Prof. Dr. Andreas Balthasar

8

What can we do?

UNIVERSITÄT
LUZERN

- Extend competences
- Creating structures and processes

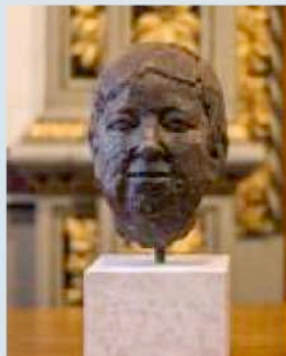
28.08.2020 SPHC «Science speaks to power: From theory to practice»

Prof. Dr. Andreas Balthasar

9

Extend competences

UNIVERSITÄT
LUZERN



What does this mean for scientists?

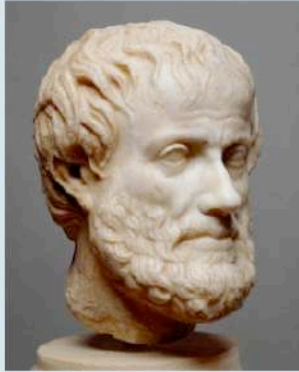
- Develop an understanding of the **logic of policy**
- Develop an understanding of the **language of policy**
- Develop an understanding of the **political agenda**

«Top 20 things, scientists need to know about policy-making» (Guardian, 2013)

28.08.2020 SPHC «Science speaks to power: From theory to practice»

Prof. Dr. Andreas Balthasar

10



What does this mean for politicians?

- Develop an understanding of the **logic of research**
- Learning to formulate **political problems as research questions**

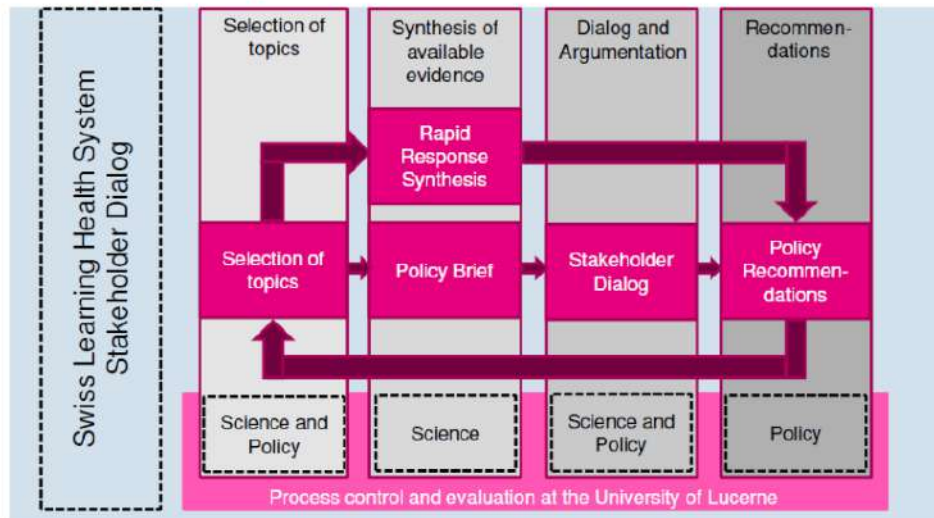
«**Twenty tips for interpreting scientific claims**»
(Nature, 2013)

Shaping the space in between (SCNAT, 2015)

Model	Expert Council	Interface-Organization	Policy-oriented Research
Method	Consulting to the best of one's knowledge and belief (honest broker)	Broad-based reports (assessments) on the state of knowledge	Inter- and transdisciplinary research
Form	Politics/administration appoints individual experts for direct exchange	Organizations of applied research	Policy defines social challenges, research addresses them
Duration Response to Policy	A few months	3 to 24 months	Several years
Example International	Healthcare UK's Advisory Board	Helmholtz Center for Health and Environment Munich	EU research programs
Example Switzerland	Swiss National COVID-19 Science Task Force	Swiss Health Observatory (OBSAN)	National Research Programs (SNF, e.g. NFP 74)

Shaping the space in between

UNIVERSITÄT
LUZERN



28.08.2020

SPHC «Science speaks to power: From theory to practice»

Prof. Dr. Andreas Balthasar

13

UNIVERSITÄT
LUZERN

Prof. Dr. Andreas Balthasar

Department of Health Science and Health Policy

University of Lucerne

andreas.balthasar@unilu.ch

www.unilu.ch



28.08.2020

SPHC «Science speaks to power: From theory to practice»

Prof. Dr. Andreas Balthasar

14

Why evidence sometimes does (not) matter – insights from practice

3rd September 2020

Swiss Public Health Conference 2020

Kathrin Huber, MPH, Deputy Secretary-General, Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Public Health (GDK / CDS)

Agenda

- ▶ Science / decision making
- ▶ Dimensions of policy making
- ▶ Main problems in the use of evidence in policy making
- ▶ Main challenges for evidence-based health policy making
- ▶ Approaches and wishes for facilitated access to evidence

Science / decision making

Science	decision making
methodology	ideology
accuracy	pragmatism
cognitive interest	problem solving
long term perspective	short term perspective

Example I: minimal case numbers in hospitals

- Increasing national and international evidence that minimal case numbers for specialised treatments advance patient safety and outcome quality
- Concern of some cantons to put at risk the security of supply for their citizens
 - ▶ Consensus GDK / CDS: recommendation to use minimal case numbers for complex treatments

Dimensions of policy making

- evidence as one of many elements
- importance of evidence varies from topic to topic



Swiss Public Health Conference 2020

3rd September 2020

Kathrin Huber, MPH

5

Main problems in the use of evidence in policy making

- Relevance of evidence in proportion to practical needs
- Difficulty to apply evidence to local conditions
- Scientists and politicians have different interests in knowledge
- Possibility (and willingness) to act on the basis of evidence
- Understanding of the research community of the functioning and the needs of «practice»

Swiss Public Health Conference 2020

3rd September 2020

Kathrin Huber, MPH

6

Example II: SARS-CoV-2

- Challenge: unknown virus, unprecedented situation of the pandemic, evolving evidence
- High need of evidence for policy making
- Very urgent need for action
 - ▶ Establishment of COVID-Science Task Force
 - ▶ Direct access of cantons and FOPH to evidence on prevention, clinical aspects, economic and social topics etc.

Swiss Public Health Conference 2020

3rd September 2020

Kathrin Huber, MPH

7

Main challenges for evidence-based health policy making

- Facilitate (timely) access to (new) evidence
- Professional competence and training of staff in administration
- Communication of evidence / making complex topics accessible without losing accuracy.
- Trustworthiness of communicators
- Expert disagreement

Swiss Public Health Conference 2020

3rd September 2020

Kathrin Huber, MPH

8

Approaches and «desiderata» for facilitated access to evidence

- Enhancing translational exchange
- Policy briefs
- Institutionalised exchange / involving experts
- Mandates for overview of evidence
- «Science Ambassadors»

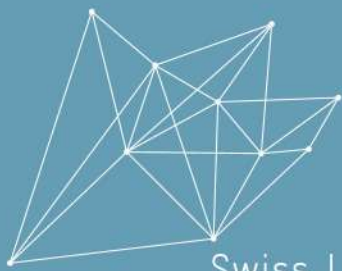
Evidence DOES matter – but not exclusively



Konferenz der kantonalen Gesundheits-
direktorinnen und -direktoren
Conférence des directrices et directeurs
cantonaux de la santé
Conferenza delle direttrici e dei direttori
cantionali della sanità

**Many thanks for your
attention!**

Kathrin Huber, MPH, kathrin.huber@gdk-cds.ch



Swiss Learning
Health System