

Closing the gap: Meeting the expectations of policy

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Policy requires to be delivered on time, to be within budget and to meet targets. The importance of policy implementation and service delivery for mental health promotion cannot be overstated. Given the complexity and contestability of the mental health promotion environment this can be very difficult and policy initiatives may be diverted, deflected, dissipated and delayed.

The past decade has witnessed an increasing awareness and greater focus on the need for sound policy implementation and seamless delivery of mental health promotion programmes. However, the challenges and skills involved in turning policy into effective outcomes are often not fully appreciated and as such results can often fall short of expectations.

Experience shows that optimal outcomes from policy initiatives are more likely to be achieved when effective leadership focuses on early and systematic consideration of the practical aspects of implementation e.g. when the question of how the policy is to be implemented is an integral component of policy implementation or by engaging stakeholders at this stage to help get the policy right and to gain a sense of potential barriers to effective implementation.

The session will be introduced by a review as to how research and practice in the field has addressed the issue of policy implementation. It will discuss such strategies as the use of implementation units, co-ordinating secretariats, downstream coordination, stakeholder involvement and capacity building.

The introduction will be followed by papers from New Zealand and USA, illustrating how specific policy initiatives were implemented and what lessons were learnt. The papers are as follows:

1. Mental health promotion services in New Zealand: Implementing policy from the ground up.

Darryl Bishop

and

2. Key Themes in School Mental Health Promotion" Mark Weist

The recommendations from the session are directed to the following:

- Implementation issues must be an integral part of policy design
- Stakeholder involvement is required at the early stage of discussions
- Consideration must be directed to ensuring adequate resources are available
- Attention must be directed towards capacity building
- Evaluation and performance monitoring must be included in policy design