The objective of our study was to examine whether, how, and why research evidence is used in state-level decision-making about policies related to childhood obesity in Minnesota. Through interviews with fifty-one stakeholders in legislative, advocacy, and state agency roles, we learned about how they use research, the barriers they face, and their recommendations for improving a system that facilitates stakeholder use of evidence.

So, what did we find? Stakeholders believe that research evidence should be considered in designing programs and policies, but in practice, many do not have the time or resources to consistently do so.

What’s happening now?
Policy stakeholders use research to support current and proposed policies, to educate the public, and to overcome anecdote- or value-based arguments in the policy process, but they differ in how equipped they are to achieve these goals.

What are the challenges?

- **Insufficient evidence or infrastructure.**
  - Information overload: stakeholders have too little time to read through too much information, especially if presented in full article or report form.
  - Mismatch between the types of evidence available (obesity prevalence and consequences) versus what is needed (program evaluation, return on investment, cost-effectiveness).
  - Lack of a formal system or infrastructure for finding and communicating research evidence.

- **Key players may be isolated.**
  - Limited personal relationships between decision-makers and researchers can create a lack of mutual understanding and/or trust.
  - Stakeholders may want to consult research evidence, but cannot locate the relevant resources.

What can we improve?

**Bridge research and communication gaps.**
- Researchers and decision-makers must work together to produce timely research evidence that is locally- and policy-relevant.
- Evidence should appear in more accessible formats—such as one-page executive summaries, bullet points, infographics, and personal narrative.

**Expand infrastructure to communicate evidence**
- Create a comprehensive, topic-specific research expert list with contact information.
- Set up a web-based clearinghouse as a centralized resource for research syntheses on policy-relevant topics (like Safe Routes to School, SHIP, and school nutrition).

**Broaden approaches to research**
- Researchers should involve external stakeholders (legislators, agency staff, and advocates) in brainstorming research questions and designing studies.
- Research institutions should increase opportunities for networking between researchers and external stakeholders to establish and maintain professional relationships.

While there were some general commonalities among the three stakeholder groups, each group had some very different impressions and recommendations, which are detailed in the following report.

For more information or to contact the research team, visit the project website: [http://z.umn.edu/obesitypolicy](http://z.umn.edu/obesitypolicy)

Citation: Jou J, Gollust SE, Nanney MS. Report on “Using Obesity Research More Effectively to Shape State Policy,” based on findings from Evidence Translation for Childhood Obesity Prevention in Minnesota, funded by the NIH (R03 5R03HD0711560-02, Co-PIs Gollust and Nanney) and the University of Minnesota Healthy Foods Healthy Lives Institute.

Version: January 2014