The objective of this research 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.

The study participants were 51 stakeholders who were interviewed: 16 in legislative roles, 16 in advocacy roles, and 19 in state agency roles.

The interview questions included: 1) How stakeholders use research; 2) the barriers they face; and 3) their recommendations for improving a system that facilitates stakeholder use of evidence.

So, what did we find? Legislators, legislative researchers, and legislative aides/staff 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?
Legislators and legislative staff use research in combination with other types of persuasive information—such as constituent concerns or personal narratives—to understand and evaluate policy or programs.

What are the challenges?

Insufficient evidence or infrastructure.
- Information overload: legislators and legislative staff have too little time to read through a lot of information.
- While the University of Minnesota is seen as a rich source of high-quality, non-partisan research evidence, legislators and legislative staff find it difficult to connect with researchers at the University.
- A system is lacking for finding and communicating research evidence outside of existing legislative research resources.

Key players may lack connections to each other.
- Limited personal relationships between decision-makers and researchers can create a lack of mutual understanding and trust.
- Legislators and legislative staff may want to consult research evidence, but cannot locate the relevant resources.

What can we improve?

Expand infrastructure to communicate evidence.
- Set up a web-based clearinghouse as a centralized resource for research summaries on policy-relevant topics.
- Create a topic-specific list of research experts who are willing to be contacted for information and/or testimony.

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

Broaden approaches to research.
- Legislators and legislative staff want researchers to consider broader, policy-relevant questions and implications when designing studies and communicating their results.
- Research institutions should increase opportunities for networking between researchers and external stakeholders to establish and maintain professional relationships.

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

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Research is important, but I often find that researchers are out of touch with legislators. They’re rewarded for doing research, they get grants for it, but they’re not rewarded for disseminating and getting it into policy. That’s what we do. We’re just in two different universes.

—Legislator (DFL)

Research is very important. It opens people’s eyes to the reality of what’s going on.

—Legislator (R)

The golden, ‘money’ package is when a constituent presents a message that has data and anecdotes…you see the members’ faces perk up.

—Legislative Aide