Title of abstract: Future Research Needs (FRNs) -- Sugars and Health Outcomes

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Objective: To implement a novel FRN process using evidence mapping to inform and engage stakeholders to prioritize FRNs relating sugar intake to health outcomes.

Methods/Design: Evidence mapping is a new method that systematically characterizes the range of research activity in broad topic areas. We created an evidence map (EM) on sugars and health outcomes using an iterative process. A diverse and balanced stakeholder panel was established utilizing existing networks. Stakeholders were engaged early and throughout the entire FRN process using various techniques, including emails, periodic webinars, survey monkey, and one in-person meeting (October 2013). We surveyed stakeholders’ input to refine EM eligibility criteria and to prioritize a list of research topics. A private web discussion forum was also set up for topic generations and discussions. As the EM data collection process continued, the web forum was updated weekly with new evidence gaps and research questions stimulate discussions.

Results/Implications: Our literature search yielded 13,008 citations. Populations, Interventions/Exposures, Comparators, and Outcomes (PIECO) information from 708 abstracts was extracted to create evidence map. We included 213 studies based on stakeholders’ input on prioritizations and extracted more detailed information on PIECO and study design characteristics to construct the final EM database, which covers 88% of the topics in the published literature. Twenty stakeholders were approached and fourteen were recruited. The final stakeholder panel consisted of two lay audiences, two health providers (a dietician and a physician), one research funder, two policy makers, one evidence-based methodologist, five researchers with different expertise, and one retired personnel from the industry. By closely communicating and guiding stakeholders, we were able to keep them interested and engaged throughout the EM process with an overall participation rate above 90%. Stakeholders are now informed and ready to discuss and prioritize the top 10 FRN topics in the upcoming in-person meeting.

Conclusions: Through close private-academic partnership, we were successful in recruiting and engaging academic and policy stakeholders. However, recruiting and engaging lay stakeholders remained difficult. Overall, evidence mapping appears to be a cost-effective method to generate evidence-based information to inform and facilitate FRN process.

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