Learning for Action Across Health Systems – summary sheet

Project outline

The problem: Countries with similar levels of income often have widely different health outcomes. What are some countries doing that others are not? If countries could learn from one another and take action based on those lessons, it may lead to healthier populations around the world. Yet, particularly in low-income countries (LICs), very little is known about the learning practices of health actors.

The objective: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) would like to improve the ability of LICs to learn from, and act on, the successes and failures of other country's health systems. This project will develop recommendations for the BMGF on how they can target their investment to achieve this goal over the period 2018–2022. These recommendations will be made publicly available in various formats so that the output can be a global public good for other funding agencies, policy-makers and researchers to build on.

The approach: We will focus on three questions. What can countries learn from one another's experiences? How can countries learn from one another's experiences? Why do policy-makers sometimes want or not want to learn from one another's experience? There is a significant body of tacit/unwritten and explicit/written knowledge on these questions. We will use a combination of a literature review and institutional case studies (the landscaping reviews), structured expert meetings and a series of field interviews (with in-country policy-makers) to combine an account of this tacit and explicit knowledge. The literature and institutional case study reviews will describe the nature of the current landscape that aims to facilitate learning across health systems. The expert meetings will enable us to draw on the tacit knowledge of a selection of international experts and people with extensive practical policy experience. The field interviews will enable us to go into depth in 10 country health systems, talking to the people whose decisions have made these systems what they are today. Our final recommendations will be based on the answers to these three questions.

The deliverables: The final deliverable will be a strategy paper and an internal concept brief (ICB) on future investment in learning for action across health systems for LICs by the BMGF. The strategy paper will provide suggested theories of change, roles, comparative advantage and investment areas (including vehicles for investment) that the foundation may consider. It will outline anticipated challenges and suggestions for overcoming them, as well as what impact the suggested investments may have on the international policy sphere. The ICB will follow the BMGF template, relaying the content of the strategic paper. The recommendations will also be published in a variety of formats for wide dissemination (including targeted policy briefs, blogs, a social media presence and articles for peer review). A side event will be coordinated at a prominent international health systems conference.

The team: The project is being funded by the BMGF and is being implemented by Oxford Policy Management (OPM). Technical guidance is provided by four internationally renowned health systems thinkers – Kara Hanson, Barbara McPake, Sophie Witter and Ian Anderson.