Influences on the implementation of evidence-based guidelines: Highlights from state tobacco control programs

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Background

While the evidence base for tobacco control is considered one of the most developed in the field of public health, little research has been conducted regarding the dissemination, adoption, and implementation of evidence-based guidelines for tobacco control. This project began to address this research gap by evaluating state tobacco control partners' utilization of 13 different evidence-based guidelines. As awareness and availability of guidelines does not necessarily translate to implementation in practice, the evaluation placed a large focus on the facilitators and barriers to guideline implementation.

Evidence-based guidelines for tobacco control:

Methods

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with an average of 22 key tobacco control partners in each of seven states and the District of Columbia.
- Data were collected under three main areas of the evaluation framework:

  Dissemination
  How did partners learn of evidence-based guidelines?

  Adoption
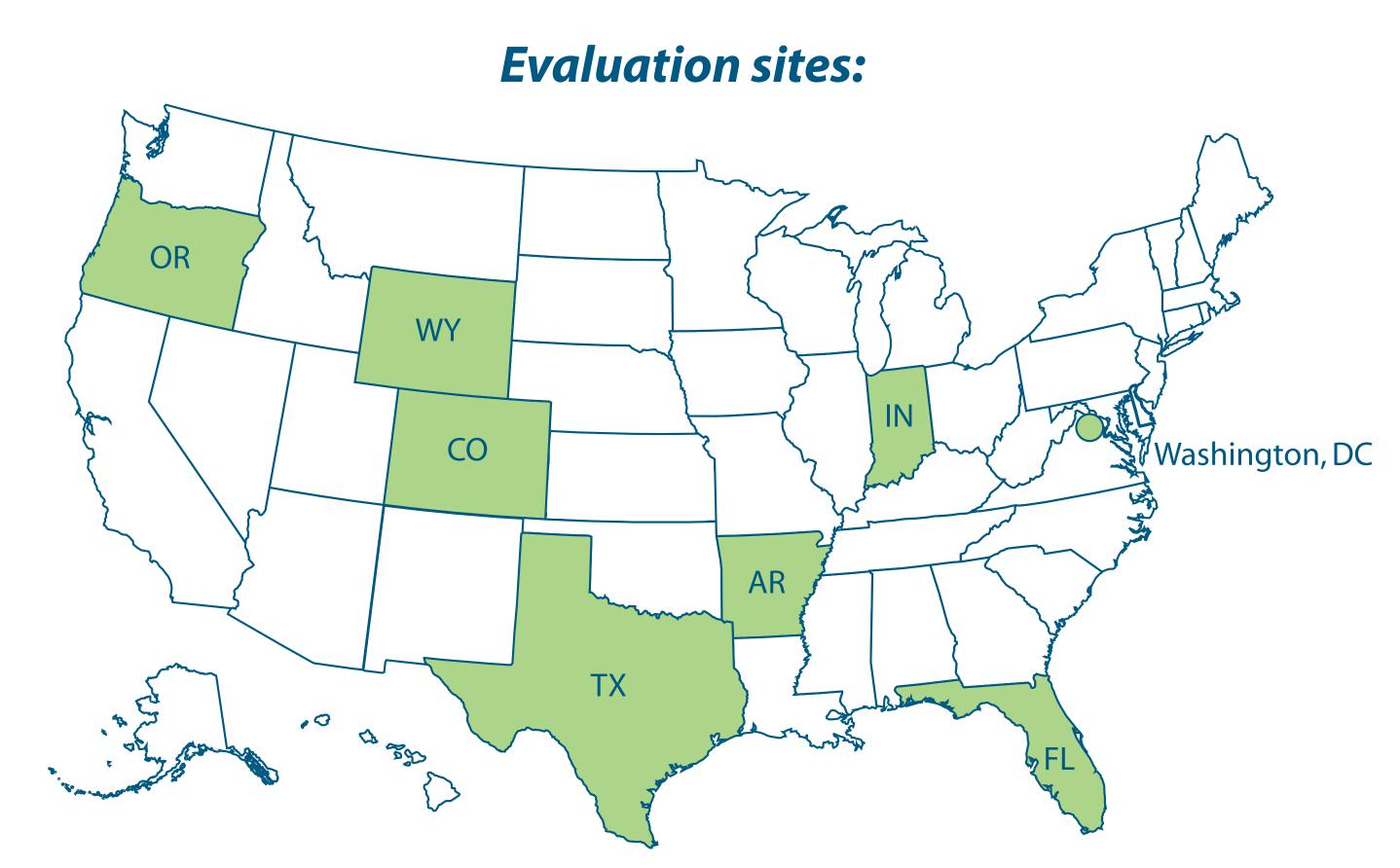 *What factors played a role in decision-making for tobacco control?*
  How did organizational characteristics influence the adoption of guidelines?

  Implementation
  How did partners utilize particular evidence-based guidelines?
  What additional resources were needed to enhance tobacco control efforts?

- Qualitative analyses were conducted to identify key themes both within and across states.

Evaluation sites:

Highlights

Facilitators and barriers to the use of evidence-based guidelines (EBGs)

The degree to which particular guidelines were incorporated into partners' work was dependent on factors tied to the three main phases of information diffusion: dissemination, adoption, and implementation. Such factors included avenues of guideline dissemination, presence or absence of support by individuals or policies, and the feasibility of applying information to one's work.

Facilitators		
• Distribution of EBGs by lead agency • Promotion through trainings and conferences	• EBGs provide effective strategies and credibility to states' approaches • Use encouraged by organization leadership • EBGs promote consistency of efforts across the country if followed	• Can use EBGs to defend efforts and funding to policymakers • EBGs provide framework for efforts • EBGs help prioritize efforts
Dissemination ➜	**Adoption** ➜	**Implementation**
Barriers		
• Slow translation of research into guidelines • Limited access to common dissemination modes (e.g., conferences)	• EBG recommendations conflict with traditional practices • EBGs perceived as inapplicable to context • Over-abundance of guidelines	• Guideline comprehension • Bureaucractic barriers • Funding constraints • Unsupportive political climate • Lack of guidance on "real world" applications & strategies for addressing disparities

Recommendations

Based on findings from this evaluation, the following are recommended for researchers and national organizations involved in developing and disseminating evidence-based guidelines.

Guideline dissemination
- Utilize existing contact and collaboration networks to disseminate guidelines.
- Ensure that guidelines are disseminated beyond the state lead agency.
- Accompany release of guidelines with active forms of dissemination (e.g., presentations).
- Identify how guidelines connect to other currently available resources.

Training and technical assistance
- Provide training and technical assistance to enhance guideline comprehension and utilization.
- Promote sharing of successes and lessons learned among stakeholders to illustrate how guidelines can be implemented.

Guideline development and updates
- Identify opportunities for shortening the lag time between research and production of evidence-based guidelines.
- Ensure that organizational policies and resources allow guidelines to be updated more frequently (e.g., posting of supplements to websites).
- Utilize new technologies (e.g., web, social media) for quicker release of information.

Additional resources
- Regularly identify gaps in the evidence base and develop or connect stakeholders to resources commonly requested, such as:
  - Working effectively with policymakers;
  - Eliminating health-related disparities; and
  - Prioritizing interventions with limited funding.

Summary

- Despite the importance of evidence-based guidelines to partners' work and the abundance of information available, significant barriers exist to implementing guidelines in practice.
- Understanding and addressing barriers to the dissemination, adoption, and implementation of evidence-based guidelines is critical to optimizing use of guidelines by intended stakeholders and ultimately, to decreasing the burden of tobacco use.

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