Bringing politics and evidence together: Policy entrepreneurship and the conception of the At Home/Chez Soi Housing First Initiative for addressing homelessness and mental illness in Canada

Eric Macnaughton [a,*], Geoffrey Nelson [b], Paula Goering [c]

[a] Mental Health Commission of Canada, Adler School of Psychology (Vancouver), Canada
[b] Wilfrid Laurier University, Canada
[c] Centre for Addiction & Mental Health, University of Toronto, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

An interesting question concerns how large-scale (mental) health services policy initiatives come into being, and the role of evidence within the decision-making process behind their origins. This paper illustrates the process by which motivation to address homelessness, in the context of the upcoming 2010 Vancouver Olympics, was leveraged into a pan-Canadian project including sites in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Moncton, New Brunswick. The aim of the initiative was to implement and evaluate an intervention, Housing First, to provide housing and support to previously homeless people with mental illness. This qualitative case study was conducted between December 2009 and December 2010, employing grounded theory, and drawing on archival documents and interviews with 19 key informants involved in the conception of the project. Overall, the findings affirm that policy-making does not follow a rational, linear process of knowledge translation/exchange (KTE) and implementation, whereby evidence-based "products" are brought forward to address objectively determined needs and then "placed into decision-making events" (Lomas, 2007, p. 130). Instead, evidence-based policy making should be understood within the much more complex context of "policy entrepreneurship" (Kingdon, 2003; Mintrom & Norman, 2009) which entails taking advantage of windows of opportunity, and helping to bring together the "streams" of problems, politics, and policy ideas (Kingdon, 2003).

© 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

The At Home/Chez Soi project is the largest mental health services trial ever mounted in Canada. Funded by Health Canada and carried out by the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), the project uses a randomized controlled trial (RCT) design, following more than 2200 previously homeless people with mental illness in five cities for two years to examine outcomes (Goering et al., 2011). The focus of the current paper is on a qualitative study of the process of the conception of the At Home/Chez Soi, which the project team believed would provide useful lessons for other jurisdictions regarding the diffusion of innovative ideas for addressing complex health and social problems, like mental illness and homelessness.

As the research proceeded, it became evident that moving the ideas behind this initiative into policy entailed effectively positioning the outlines of a potential solution within a complex political climate, a process that can be understood as "policy entrepreneurship" (Kingdon, 2003; Mintrom & Norman, 2009), which brings the three "streams" of "politics", "problems" and "policies" together. Given the current focus on "evidence-based" policy making, and growing attention to the complex intersections between evidence and the political and social aspects of decision-making and "agenda setting" (Battams & Baum, 2010; Fischer, 2003; Kingdon, 2003; Russell, Greenhalgh, Byrne, & McDonnell, 2008; Tiernan & Burke, 2002), this investigation thus offered a valuable chance to broaden understandings on innovative policy-making in the mental health field. Finally, the present research, with its qualitative, case-study approach, also offers a chance to build our understanding of what is increasingly recognized as the "complex, dynamic, and social" nature of evidence-based policy-making approaches, such as knowledge exchange (Ward, Smith, House, & Hamer, 2012).

The focus of the paper is on the political phase of the At Home/Chez Soi initiatives' conception; hence, the perspective taken looks outward from Kingdon's "political stream" towards the "policy" and

* Corresponding author. 5475 Sophia St., Vancouver, BC V5W 2W2, Canada. Tel.: +1 604 6873996.
E-mail address: emacnaug@telus.net (E. Macnaughton).

"problem" spheres, and focuses on how policy entrepreneurship helped link these spheres during this initial phase and resulted in the initiatives' funding. This paper is abstracted from a larger study (Macnaughton, Nelson, Piat, Eckerle Curwood, & Egalité, 2010) that also looks more closely at how the initiatives' policy specifics were adapted in response to local communities' perspectives on the problem. Factors related to cross-site implementation of the initiative (e.g., the coherence of the policy idea) or the longer-term sustainability of this (still in progress) demonstration project, will thus not be closely examined in this paper.

Some may argue whether demonstration projects could be considered "policy", given questions about continuation of funding; this risk, however, was weighed carefully against the tremendous opportunity to create a long-term policy legacy. At the time of writing, there has been formal commitment to continue funding the Housing First model at all sites beyond the end of the demonstration period, either indefinitely or for a transitional period, while the possible options for permanent funding are negotiated. In the event that plans are not fully realized in a local site, the project will transition those participants to other housing and support services. There are also many examples of the ways in which the project has already achieved shifts in program and system policy, both nationally (Goering & Tsemberis, in press), and internationally, including the launching of similar demonstration initiatives in France (Goering et al., 2012), Australia, and Portugal.

Literature review

Community mental health and homelessness

Despite the reforms of the community mental health movement, there is a general consensus that a large "quality chasm" exists between what the research suggests people with serious mental illness should receive and the proportion of individuals actually receiving those services (Lehman, 2010). The inadequacies of mental health services are reflected by the over-representation of people with mental illness among the justice system and among the ranks of the impoverished and homeless (Rochefort, 1997). Indeed, a study of two North American cities showed that people with serious mental illness accounted for approximately 50% of total bed days within homeless shelters, which have become a de facto parallel system of care for homeless people with mental illness (Culhane & Metraux, 2008).

As Battams and Baum (2010) described, inadequate housing for people with mental illness has been compounded by issues such as affordability, loss of housing stock, divided accountability, and lack of a "common view" about solutions that could facilitate action across the various policy and service delivery partners involved in housing people with mental illness. Moreover, in Canada specifically, as in other Western nations, a political climate of neo-liberalism has contributed to the withdrawal of government from the social housing sphere, both in terms of funding and policy attention (Gaetz, 2010); the result is that what were previously federal and provincial responsibilities for social housing have now been increasingly placed on municipal governments, which lack funding to fill the policy void (Carroll & Jones, 2000).

In regards to homelessness and mental illness, there has been slow progress in implementing appropriate interventions, which the Nelson, Aubry, and Lafrance (2007) review shows, should combine Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) or Intensive Case Management (ICM), with supported housing, as does the Pathways/ Housing First approach. Unlike traditional purpose-built mental health housing, the Pathways approach provides the individual with independent housing, and provides support on a mobile basis (Tsemberis, Gulcur, & Nakae, 2004).

Mental health policy responses

In response to the policy failure of community mental health in North America, and due to the growing public concern that accompanied it, Canada and the United States have recently undergone large-scale federal policy review processes. In the United States, a major consultation known as the President's New Freedom Commission was conducted. In Canada, a cross-country Senate consultation, spearheaded by then-Senator Michael Kirby, led to the report *Out of the Shadows* (Kirby & Keon, 2006). In both cases, these reviews resulted in a series of recommendations oriented towards developing evidence-based, recovery-oriented supports for people with serious mental illness. In Canada, supported housing was a central plank of the overall recommendations, and the report lead to the formation of the MHCC, funded for 10 years to spearhead reform. The MHCC has a formal organizational structure, and a board and committee structure that includes people with mental illness, family members, and mental health professionals. Through its committee structure the MHCC is also closely linked to an informal mental health policy network throughout Canada, and in the various provinces. For instance, the Chair of the MHCC's Services Committee, Steve Lurie, is well connected to an Ontario policy network that has contributed to previous reform in the province (Wiktorowicz, 2005).

The rationalist, evidence-based approach to mental health policy-making

In both countries, mental health policy reform coincided with efforts within the health services and policy fields to develop systematic and sustained strategies for translating evidence about what works into concrete policies and practices, a process often referred to in Canada as "knowledge exchange", "knowledge translation" or knowledge translation and exchange (KTE). For instance, the "Knowledge to Action" model, which has been adopted by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), involves a series of steps for developing, synthesizing, tailoring and applying knowledge to a given problem within a specific local context (Graham et al., 2006). The CIHR model in fact does encompass non-linear events such as interaction and mutual learning between researchers and policy-makers, and evidence is acknowledged to encompass experience and expertise. However, the emphasis of the model is arguably on employing systematic techniques for moving research evidence into policy and practice to address evidence/practice gaps.

In the United States, Damschroder et al. (2009) review a number of similar approaches that have arisen within the burgeoning field of "implementation science." Internationally, a number of authors have contributed to a special issue of *Health Research Policy and Systems* on "evidence-informed policy-making", which describes systematic procedures for using evidence during three stages — problem clarification, options formulation, implementation planning — of the policy-making process (Oxman, Lavis, Lewin, & Fretheim, 2009).

Underlying all of these approaches is the apparently reasonable assumption that effective policy reform hinges on the ability to develop and apply systematic techniques — or "technicist" approaches (Ward et al., 2012) — for addressing these evidence/practice gaps. Another underlying assumption here is that objective solutions exist to clearly manifested problems that potential knowledge users (e.g., policy-makers or clinicians) can be persuaded and helped to implement.

Critique of the rationalist, evidence-based approach

In an alternative constructionist view, such problems are by nature not objectively apparent, but are usually multi-faceted in

nature and thus amenable to being conceptualized in different ways (Fischer, 2003; Kingdon, 2003). Given this complexity and ambiguity, difficult social problems (e.g., homelessness and mental illness) are subject to contestation, negotiation and "claims making" (Humphreys & Rappaport, 1993; Kingdon, 2003), and thus are part of a process that is intrinsically social and political in nature.

Unlike the traditional mental health services research fields, which tend to be dominated by psychology and psychiatry, disciplines such as sociology, political science and policy studies have been turning away from rationalist approaches to understanding policy decision-making over the past few decades. For instance, an influential paper within sociology (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) has pointed out how regardless of any evidence attesting to their importance, social problems must nevertheless compete with each other for attention within policy-making "arenas". Hilgartner and Bosk further note the key role often played by "policy operatives" in this struggle to move a particular issue forward (i.e., individuals who understand how to position issues within policy arenas).

Similarly, Kingdon (2003) talks about the role of "policy entrepreneurs" in helping policy problems and solutions survive the competition with other pressing issues, and grab the attention of decision-makers. Policy entrepreneurship is essentially about the skill of certain individuals and the capacity of small groups of individuals to take advantage of unique windows of opportunity and to frame a solution in terms that catalyse a convergence of the "streams" of "problems, politics, and policy ideas". As Kingdon argues, in order for a policy idea to go forward, a social issue must be defined as a "political problem". Then, a solution must be advanced that facilitates a convergence of various interested stakeholders, both internal and external to government, into a cohesive "policy coalition" in support of the particular idea (Sabatier, 1988). As Kingdon argues, and as Mintrom and Norman (2009) later elaborate, the role of the policy entrepreneur is often crucial in taking advantage of emerging opportunities and putting forward ideas that facilitate consensus and collective action towards a solution.

Methodology

The study employed key informant interviews and qualitative analysis using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) to address the research question, which was: what is the process by which the broad outlines of the At Home/Chez initiative came into being?

Constructivist grounded theory consists of three stages: initial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding. The use of disciplinary theory is considered appropriate during the theoretical coding stage, providing the theory is not a predetermined lens, and "earns its way into the analysis" (cf. Charmaz, 2006). Between December 2008, and April of 2009, the researchers interviewed 19 individuals at various locations in this Pan-Canadian study who were involved in the inception of the project, and who were known by At Home/Chez Soi project leaders as being intimately familiar with the various aspects of the projects' origin from different perspectives. These informants included decision-makers familiar with the federal political context ($n = 4$), informants who were familiar with the evolving policy formation process at the federal level ($n = 5$), and informants who were more familiar with how the politics and policy-making played out at each of the sites ($n = 10$). Participants were contacted initially, usually by email, and then interviewed in person ($n = 10$), or over the phone ($n = 9$), by one of four researchers, who obtained their informed consent for the study. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Ethics approval was obtained through Wilfrid Laurier University, including approval to use identifying quotes for those respondents who gave consent to be named.

Consistent with grounded theory, the interview guide was not guided by any specific theoretical framework. Instead informants were asked to "tell the story of how the At Home/Chez Soi project came into being". They were then probed on issues such as timing, key players, how funding was assured, how the policy and research aspects of the project were conceptualized, as well as facilitating and hindering factors in the initial conceptualization phase.

A potential limitation of key informant interviews was the possibility that interviewees, often senior policy-makers, would withhold sensitive information. In order to facilitate more open dialogue, two senior researchers conducted in-person interviews determined to be of a more sensitive political nature. Also, for purposes of triangulation of data sources, and to understand more fully the political context surrounding decision-making, the researchers also examined a number of relevant documents. These included media and policy documents related to the period immediately before the idea for what became the At Home/Chez Soi project arose in the political sphere (i.e., between April, 2007 and January, 2008), and project planning documents (e.g., a funding agreement, Project Precis) developed between January and May 2008.

A team approach to coding was adopted, in which two researchers read and initially coded transcripts, then subsequently met and achieved consensus on major codes, which were then reviewed by three other project team members. The coding was completed by hand (rather than by computer program). Researchers employed member-checking with key informants (i.e., returning the data, the chronology and analysis to them to ensure its trustworthiness). This resulted in some new data and helped optimize the credibility of the findings. Overall, key informants concurred with the factual account and with the thematic analysis. It should be noted that Michael Kirby, who emerged as a key actor in the study, was also a key informant. His account, and the subsequent thematic analysis that featured his involvement, was corroborated through the member-checking process. Comments emphasizing his role must be taken in context of the chronology created by the document analysis, particularly the Vancouver back story, which happened prior to the project.

Member-checking using outside informants minimized the possibility of interpretive bias of researchers who were part of the At Home/Chez Soi project, and thus part of the political and policy streams themselves that they were studying, though it should be emphasized that none of the authors has an ongoing working relationship with Mr. Kirby. Emergent themes identified were those that had repeatedly been coded by the research team to the point of theoretical saturation. In order to optimize the trustworthiness of the findings, and to ensure that the theoretical coding framework had appropriately "earned its way" into the analysis, the researchers delayed doing an extensive literature review until later in the analysis. Interview data and the document analysis was also used to reconstruct a chronology of the At Home/Chez Soi project, and of the context leading up to the initial decision to consider a homelessness initiative in one of the key sites.

Findings

Chronology

The story of the conception of the At Home/Chez Soi project

The At Home/Chez Soi project has its roots in the MHCC. Beginning in 2003, Senator Michael Kirby chaired a Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology. After holding more than 50 meetings and hearing separately from more than 300 people from across Canada, the committee produced a report (Kirby & Keon, 2006) that recommended the creation of the MHCC.

In March 2007, Prime Minister Harper and Minister of Health Tony Clement asked Senator Kirby to chair the Commission.

In January, 2008, Mr. Kirby received a telephone call from a senior member of the Canadian government, who asked for his assistance in formulating a project for homeless people with mental illness in Vancouver. Said Kirby of this call: "I knew they weren't messing around" and that "there was money around because it was year-end." Over the next several weeks, Mr. Kirby interacted with representatives of the federal government, as well as certain members of the mental health community, to conceptualize the broad strokes of an initiative, which at this point was conceived as entailing both research and service.

Without divulging the funding source, Mr. Kirby enlisted the help of Mr. Steve Lurie, Executive Director of the Canadian Mental Health Association/Toronto branch and head of a key MHCC committee, who brought in Dr. Paula Goering, a researcher with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health in Toronto, to help formulate the project, which grew quickly from one to five cities. Once the sites were proposed, Mr. Kirby spoke with government representatives from the provinces in which the five cities were located to get their "buy-in" to the project. With the exception of Québec, politicians from the other provinces that would host a project site gave their endorsement.

Kirby then appointed Dr. Jayne Barker, the Commission's Director of Policy and Research, to lead the initiative, who, together with MHCC Chief Operating Officer (COO), Dr. John Service, negotiated with Health Canada the broad parameters of a funding agreement that specified the guiding principles of a project that would be announced in the federal budget in March, 2008.

Vancouver: the back story

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, known as Canada's "poorest postal code", represented the countries' most visible, concentrated manifestation of homelessness. Speaking to an audience convened at Vancouver's Board of Trade in May 2007, Phillip Mangano (the U.S. "Housing Czar") referred to this situation as "one of the worst" examples of homelessness he had witnessed. Echoing local sentiments, he expressed hope that the (then) upcoming Winter Olympics would provide a catalyst for addressing the issue. Unlike Atlanta's 1996 Summer Games, where homeless people had been criminalized or offered one-way bus tickets out of town (Burbank, Andranovich, & Heying, 2001), Vancouver's Organizing Committee had ambitiously proclaimed their Games would be the world's first "socially sustainable" Olympics, which would create an "affordable housing legacy" (Author, 2002).

Armed with this "Olympic promise", local housing advocates pressed for sustained attention to this issue. Around the time of Mangano's visit, a local "Olympic watchdog" coalition gave the Organizing Committee a grade of D- on its social sustainability agenda in a widely covered media event. The concerns of other advocates about Olympic-related gentrification of Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotels in the cities' Downtown Eastside also received considerable media exposure. These events in turn led to national media attention, particularly around the Vancouver Mayor's statement later in May 2007 that the province should deal with the housing problem by reopening closed portions of the province's main psychiatric institution and use these for "semi-independent living". The Mayor also reminded the federal government, then in a minority parliament position, that the "world would be arriving at our doorsteps" for the Olympics in 2010, and suggested that "they had a problem".

In early June of 2007, the attention on homelessness and the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver was compounded by the release of a United Nations affiliate organization's report on the impact of Olympics and other mega-events on housing displacement, which expressed concern about Vancouver's situation. Soon after the release of this international report, following a human rights complaint supported by the Olympic watchdog group, a UN "special rapporteur" was sent to Canada in the fall of 2007 (Delisle, 2010). Based on the findings of the visit, on November 1, 2007, the UN released a set of recommendations addressing housing and homelessness in Canada, which paid particular attention to Vancouver's situation (Kothari, 2007). Finally, on January 23, 2008, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (a national council of "big city" Mayors, at the time co-chaired by Vancouver's Mayor) released a report calling for a "national plan to end homelessness and deliver affordable housing" (Author, 2008). As noted, it was in January 2008 that Mr. Kirby received his phone call.

Thematic analysis of the key informant interviews: factors contributing to the Initiative's conception

In this section, we describe themes elucidating why this project received financial support from the federal government, and illuminating how the broad parameters of the initiative were conceptualized. These themes help to explain initiative's conception, and will be further elaborated in the Discussion, when we look them in relation to a specific theoretical framework.

Crystallization of consensus about the need to do something about homelessness

The following key informant quotations illuminate the description of events depicted in the chronology and indicate the emergence of a broad-based consensus that was crystallized by the upcoming Vancouver Olympics:

"I think there was a pivotal time when people recognized that homelessness was really an issue in Canada. " (federal policy key informant)

Q: "Was this to deflect attention from the Olympics?" A: "Well partly Olympics, partly, cause the province of B.C. was putting pressure on them, partly because the local members [of federal parliament] wanted [action]. You know […] the Downtown Eastside is a pretty sore [spot] …" (Michael Kirby)

"[The situation was discussed politically] … in the context of the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics, which was a very important factor to acquiring the funding." (federal policy key informant)

While key informants did not suggest why the Olympics would be such an important factor in the initiative's formation, the "back story" chronology would suggest why. According to the key informants, at this point decision-makers were not clear exactly *what* the problem was, or how to proceed, but there was a definite consensus that something had to be done.

Framing the problem in terms of mental illness

The next theme had to do with the emerging consensus that successfully addressing homelessness involved recognizing the links between this issue and mental illness. As the quotations suggest, the consensus had to do with evidence, perceptions, as well as political support from the highest level.

"…homelessness and mental illness are linked…it just made sense." (federal political key informant)

"The idea started with 'let's do something for the homeless on the downtown east side of Vancouver.' But because of the Prime Minister's interest in dealing with people with mental illness, it expanded into a project targeted at the homeless mentally ill." (Michael Kirby)

"…It's pretty well known that…there's a huge percentage of people who are homeless that have mental health

issues…because of the link to the Commission and the view that there is a vehicle here, an arm's length organization from government that was set up … to look at mental health issues. It was felt that that was more of an appropriate fit [i.e., with the Commission, rather than with the federal ministry responsible for housing, Human Resources & Social Development Canada]…. On that point it's been… a well known point … that the current [Conservative] government … philosophically … support(s) … the engagement of third party organizations." (federal political key informant)

In sum, a convergence of reasons involving research evidence, public perceptions and political philosophy led the project to be framed in terms of homelessness and mental illness to be driven by the MHCC.

Key factors influencing the project's initial framing: trust in leadership

As the next series of comments illustrate, perhaps the *most* important characteristic of the vehicle driving the initiative was the person that led it.

(on Michael Kirby's qualities): "Obviously everyone knows … his political background [as a Liberal politician], but I think Kirby was able to transcend those political lines, … given that, at the end of the day, what people really respect are fresh and innovative ideas…. I think that's what gave him the ability to … transcend those political lines and to be recognized as an individual that can actually get something done…. I think it's also …Kirby's keen sense of how government works that would allow him to situate his ideas within a machinery that I think we all kind of recognize can be … cumbersome at times…. But he's able to … speak a language that people understand and express ideas in a way that will resonate with the key decision-makers." (federal political key informant)

"I think it depended heavily on Mike Kirby's relationships … he was the person that brought this about on the non-governmental side as far as I can understand it." (federal political key informant)

"Because of Mike Kirby's previous experience here (in previous Mental Health Commission consultations) and his relationships, the idea of the project didn't seem like some white knight from the east coming in to save the day." (site-level policy maker)

As Kirby himself said: "I wasn't a rabid Liberal… I was known as a policy guy."

In sum, the comments suggest that what made Kirby a trusted driver of the policy-making "vehicle" (the MHCC) was his credibility as a policy-maker and his ability to express ideas in a way that resonated with decision-makers and transcended political and geographic boundaries.

Framing a politically reasonable solution

Another aspect of framing the solution had to do with ensuring the project would be conceptualized so that its external politics would be seen as "reasonable", as these quotations from Kirby suggest.

"This was meant to be a [research] project from the beginning. The feds couldn't get into actually providing the services, because then you'd be in this whole constitutional quagmire. [since provinces are responsible for (mental) health services delivery]"

"If you're going to do a demonstration project, you've got to do it across the country or you get killed politically… Politically, if a pilot project is run in only one area, and if the area you picked is

Vancouver, then it looks like the government is pandering only to the Olympics… The politics of what you want to do is really good. But, if I can put my political hat on … (I) would say you'd better do it in two or three other places…and if you're going to do that, you might as well do one in every region of the country."

As these comments suggest, in order for the project to be politically reasonable, it had to be conceptualized as a research demonstration project and as a national, rather than site-specific, initiative.

Feeding the beast: using inside knowledge to mobilize political support

The comments of one key informant from the federal political sphere suggested that the process of policy-making could be considered as "feeding the beast". That is, while it involves numerous players, and the processing of much policy information, as the following comments by Kirby illustrate, it ultimately came down to a fast, closed process involving a relatively small group of insiders, where Mr. Kirby played a pivotal role.

"So [after I had the initial phone call] I said 'who do I know who could possibly know anything about this project?' so I phoned (*name of individual*), and I talked to (*name of individual*) and I say 'does it make any sense that we would look at this crowd and so on.' And he says 'absolutely'. And I said 'do we know anybody that could work with you [over the weekend] to give me the rough outline of, a research project'… So I talked and he said the person you've got to talk to is (*name of individual*) …so this is where the subterfuge came in… Because of the secrecy surrounding the budgeting process I told them we've got a large potential donor."

…then the question [from senior government representatives] was 'how do we know that the provinces aren't going to get mad and start accusing us of meddling in their [jurisdiction] right?' …I said '… why don't you just phone them and ask them?' It seemed pretty simple to me. Okay. Got a call back later that day and said 'we discussed that, we think you may actually have a better chance' …because they thought I … would get an answer faster from people than going the bureaucratic route … So after talking with [B.C. Premier] Gordon Campbell [and later with other political leaders], I phone them back and I say 'done' …

In sum, the comments suggest how Michael Kirby used his skills, resources and access as an insider — both within the mental heath movement as he drew on his contacts within the mental health arena, and within government itself — to quickly ascertain the feasibility of the project and then to build broad-based support amongst the key decision-makers whose "buy-in" was necessary for establishing the project as a national initiative.

Framing the project in broad brush strokes

As the next series of comments from a variety of informants indicate, while the project was conceptualized as a national "whole of society", or multi-sectoral, demonstration project addressing homelessness and mental illness, other than specifying some key guiding principles, the funding agreement contained few specifics.

"… no one level of government could actually do something that would help address that issue. So here in government we say …you …need a whole of society approach. …we all need to be in this together to actually affect change." (federal political key informant)

"The funding agreement specifies a set of outcomes. But they didn't say 'is it going to be a randomized controlled trial? Is it going to be done nationally or done in the individual site?' They didn't shape it in that way at all." (federal policy key informant)

"It was so wide open at that point, I mean when you have … essentially a white board up there and you have a number, 110 million, five cities, the cities are specified, nothing else. [Earlier, at a meeting that took place after the funding agreement had been finalized] the talk was about whether the intervention would somehow be Housing First because that was the most evidence-based housing intervention … but that there would be a need to make sure that it worked for the Canadian context and to expand it a bit." (federal-level policy key informant)

Research evidence was involved at this point, when Kirby obtained advice about feasibility from a key researcher in his network. However, this large initiative was initially funded without a specific policy proposal, and without any detailed consideration of the evidence behind any specific intervention, a consideration of which came after the initial funding agreement was signed. Below, we consider a specific theoretical framework that can help explain the limited role of research evidence in the initiative's inception, as well as provide insight into the other themes that were identified.

Discussion

As will be discussed below, what the case study illustrates is how a person (Michael Kirby) who has all the attributes of a policy entrepreneur found himself in a unique position of influence because of a convergence of events. A man who came to public prominence as the person most responsible for negotiating the Canadian Constitution on behalf of the late Liberal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, Kirby later worked as pollster and as one of the country's most influential political strategists (Wikipedia, accessed February, 2011) before his appointment to the Senate, and then as the founding Chair of the MHCC by Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Author, 2007).

Undoubtedly, the unique position of influence Kirby found himself in was created by the surrounding context, i.e., the convergence of what Kingdon (2003) would call the political and problem streams. In particular this involved the emergence of homelessness as an area of public and political concern in advance of the 2010 Olympics, sustained media attention, and interest by a conservative government in carrying out an initiative that framed homelessness in terms of mental illness, and thus did not conflict with their worldview. At the same time, the broad outline of a solution that emerged in the policy stream clearly went beyond the agency of single actors, given its conceptualization as a "whole of society" approach, requiring the involvement of many sectors in order to address the complexity of the issue.

While the alignment of these contextual factors in these three streams (problem, politics, and policy) was consistent with what multiple streams theory (Kingdon, 2003) would suggest was necessary for some change to happen, our data nonetheless affirms that personal agency or leadership played a crucial role in making that change substantive. Because of the importance of Mr. Kirby's role in the conception of the At Home/Chez Soi initiative, our analytical framework, rather than employing the general framework of multiple streams theory, instead foregrounds the concept of policy entrepreneurship. As noted, the concept was originally formulated by Kingdon (2003) as part of multiple streams theory, which suggested that policy entrepreneurs can actively foster convergence between the streams of problems, politics and policy ideas.

Policy entrepreneurship

More recently, policy entrepreneurship has been explicated as a broader concept by Mintrom and Norman (2009), composed of four elements: social acuity, problem definition, working in teams,

and leading by example. Below, we discuss the relevance of these to the present situation.

Social acuity

Social acuity is the ability to intuit opportunities that present themselves, which in this case was an opportunity to move the "Out of the Shadows" Report housing agenda forward. Kirby makes comments that reflect that acuity (e.g., that when the government called "I knew they weren't messing around"). Moreover, it was by being embedded and having credibility within policy networks (part of Kingdon's "policy stream"), that he was in position to become aware of potential opportunities from the inside, and then be able to draw on his external policy network within the MHCC, so that he could judge whether the opportunity was feasible.

Problem definition

Astute problem definition, or "framing" (Benford & Snow, 2000) was perhaps the most salient attribute of the initial phases of the At Home/Chez Soi initiative. By publicly framing the problems of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside in terms of failed mental health policy, Vancouver's Mayor helped frame homelessness in terms of mental illness. By asking a trusted political insider with a non-partisan reputation and by placing responsibility in the hands of the non-governmental MHCC, the government then framed the problem in terms that were congruent with, or at least not antithetical to, its own "small c" conservative political philosophy. Finally, in order to go forward as a substantive, rather than symbolic, policy initiative "pandering to the Olympics", Kirby framed the At Home/Chez Soi project as a pan-Canadian initiative that respected provincial jurisdiction, "position(ing)" his ideas within the political machinery in a way that "transcended boundaries", both partisan and jurisdictional. Despite Kirby's pivotal role, it should be noted that problem definition involved the decisions of a series of individuals.

Working in teams

The essential attribute of "working in teams" is that a policy entrepreneur does not single-handedly advance a solution onto the policy agenda. Because he or she is embedded and trusted within multiple networks within the policy stream (Kingdon, 2003) and sees those networks as "repositories" of skills and information, the policy entrepreneur is inclined and able to draw upon those resources to move a solution forward (Mintrom & Norman, 2009). In the current case, Kirby was able to draw upon the resources of his MHCC network to ascertain whether the project was feasible and worthwhile, and later he was able to recruit key individuals who could articulate a more coherent approach for moving forward. By framing the potential project in terms of sensitive federalism (i.e., as a federally initiated research project respecting provincial jurisdiction for health care delivery), he was also able to mobilize a coalition of high-level political supporters within each of the provinces where the project would be located.

Leading by example

The policy entrepreneurship process entails proceeding in the face of risk. In this context, it is the policy entrepreneur's social capital, developed by demonstrating past commitment and success (e.g., with the "Out of the Shadows" Report) that gives senior decision-makers the confidence to go forward. As one key informant noted, "it was Kirby and his relationships" that enabled the project to move ahead. As Kirby himself noted, the MHCC was

offered the chance to lead the project because of the trust that senior decision-makers, including the Prime Minister himself, had in his abilities as someone who was about "ideas" and "getting things done".

Consideration of other relevant cases

A consideration of other relevant cases, both negative and positive, also suggests the crucial role of policy entrepreneurship. As noted, Battams and Baum (2010) demonstrated how housing policy development for people with mental illness in South Australia was hindered by lack of a "common view" within the mental health community and a fragmented policy network and stream. This study also served to identify aspects of the political stream, especially neo-liberalism, which influenced which general housing policy ideas could go forward in Australia. The current case could arguably be seen as influenced by this neo-liberal climate, given that the Olympics has been seen as an exercise in image creation or "place-branding" that host cities engage in to be seen as world economic centres (Burbank et al., 2001); and given the fact that the initiative was initially catalysed by image concerns in relation to homelessness on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. However, the events of the current case show that policy entrepreneurship, taking advantage of this opening in the political stream created by the Olympics, was what moved the project beyond symbolic politics and into a major national initiative with significant implications for policy.

Similarly, a consideration of the policy-making process surrounding the more widespread implementation of Housing First in the United States also suggests the importance of policy entrepreneurship (albeit in a different form) in translating the homelessness issue into a politically viable policy solution, which was skillfully navigated through an environment of neo-liberalism to advance progressive ideas. In explanation of the progress of this wider Housing First movement, Stanhope and Dunn (2011) have pointed to the leadership of Bush-era Housing Czar Philip Mangano, and suggested how the nuanced presentation of his policy strategy created a broad coalition of support, using a strategy that bridged interests of the right (e.g., "accountability", "quality of life", i.e., in cleaned up Central Business Districts frequented by tourists) with those of the centre and left (i.e., providing supported housing and income support, housing as a "right"), while focussing on a group of people, largely those with mental illness and addictions, whose welfare has become more of a concern for society at large.

Commenting on Housing First, Culhane and Metraux (2008) also discuss not only the evidence in its favour, but its ability to meet the interests of a range of stakeholders within different "policy coalitions" (Sabatier, 1988), in this case from the left and right of the political spectrum. Our earlier analysis suggests that Mangano possesses the attributes of a policy entrepreneur who, in bringing forward an evidence-based solution framed in terms acceptable to diverse stakeholders, facilitated the convergence of the streams of problems, politics, and policies.

Policy entrepreneurship: implications for knowledge exchange, evidence-based policy-making and for researchers

Instead of seeing themselves as part of a linear process, the results of the current study instead lend support to Greenhalgh and Russell's (2005) notion that proponents of knowledge translation/ exchange and evidence-based policy-making see themselves as embroiled in a "rhetorical drama", which the policy entrepreneurship process represents. While our case study foregrounded the activities of a political person, it also suggests certain implications for researchers and others seeking to help advance ideas into policy. In our example, for one member of the research team, it was a matter of being present in the network of the principle actor and being willing to first provide advice in a quick and efficient manner and later bring a more systematic appraisal of evidence-based practice into the project design. Ongoing relationships between researchers and those in government and politics that they hope to influence are seen by both sides as an important factor facilitating the use of research (Mitton, Adair, McKenzie, Patton, & Perry, 2007; Waddell et al., 2005). In order to form and maintain such relationships, researchers have to be willing to assume multiple roles that often take them out of the academic realm and into the fray of committee work, consultation, and other activities not always appropriately valued by universities (Goering & Wasylenki, 2003; Jacobson, Butterill, & Goering, 2004).

Thus, if researchers want to advance solutions, they must do more than develop techniques for advancing solutions forward to address evidence/policy gaps. They must also be prepared to understand and enter the policy and political streams, work collectively with strategic allies within them. Operating effectively within those streams then entails looking for windows of opportunity, and framing solutions in ways that resonate with external stakeholders and internal decision-makers.

Summary & conclusion

Our analysis has shown how a trusted insider was able to help advance an idea forward for funding in the political arena, even though only the "broad strokes" of a policy solution were present. An unanswered question which we address elsewhere (Macnaughton et al., 2010) concerns how the idea behind the At Home/Chez Soi was formulated more specifically in the policy arena to facilitate its adoption at the site level. The question of how Housing First catalyses reform more broadly in the mental health and housing policy arenas is also an important concern that needs to be examined.

Despite some unanswered questions, our study supports the notion that the evidence-based policy reform process is not simply a "technical exercise that places [knowledge] products into [decision-making] events" in a linear fashion (Lomas, 2007, p. 130). Instead, the process involves taking advantage of windows of opportunity within the complex policy-making world. As our case and others show, when these open, and when arising problems converge with events in the political sphere, it is policy entrepreneurship that helps unify the often fragmented worlds of mental health and housing-related policy-making, and helps all parties move forward with cohesive, coherent action. The events surrounding the initial conception of the At Home/Chez Soi initiative should remind us of the power of a small group of committed people, connected with their larger networks, to change the policy-making world.

Acknowledgements

References

Author. (2002). *2010 Winter games inner-city inclusive commitment statement: Vancouver bid corporation and partners.*

Author. (2007). Michael Kirby steps out of the shadows. *National Review of Medicine, 4*(11).

Author. (2008). *Federation of Canadian municipalities calls for national plan to end homelessness and deliver affordable housing: Federation of Canadian municipalities.*

Battams, S., & Baum, F. (2010). What policies and policy processes are needed to ensure that people with psychiatric disabilities have access to appropriate housing? *Social Science & Medicine, 70,* 1026–1034.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: an overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*(1), 611.

Burbank, M. J., Andranovich, G. D., & Heying, C. H. (2001). *Olympic dreams: The impact of mega-events on local politics.* Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner Publishers, Inc.

Carroll, B. W., & Jones, R. (2000). The road to innovation, convergence or inertia: devolution in housing policy in Canada. *Canadian Public Policy, 26*(3), 277–293.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Culhane, D., & Metraux, S. (2008). Rearranging the deck chairs or reallocating the lifeboats? Homelessness assistance and its alternatives. *Journal of the American Planning Association, 74*(1), 111–121.

Damschroder, L., Aron, D., Keith, R., Kirsh, S., Alexander, J., & Lowery, J. (2009). Fostering implementation of health services research findings into practice: a consolidated framework for advancing implementation science. *Implementation Science, 4*(50), 1–15.

Delisle, R. (2010). Counting the Vancouver 2010 Olympics' broken promises. *This Magazine.*

Fischer, F. (2003). *Reframing public Policy: Discursive politics and deliberative practices.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gaetz, S. (2010). The Struggle to end homelessness in Canada: how we created the crisis, and how we can end it. *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal, 3,* 21–26.

Goering, P., Girard, V., Aubry, T., Barker, J., Fontanier, C., Latimer, E., et al. (2012). Conduite d'essais relatifs aux politiques qui soutiennent le modèle d'intervention accordant la priorité au logement: l'histoire de deux pays. *Lien Social & Politique, 67,* 161–182.

Goering, P., Streiner, D., Adair, C., Aubry, T., Barker, J., Distasio, J., et al. (2011). The At Home/Chez Soi trial protocol. *BMJ Open, 1*(2).

Goering, P., & Tsemberis, S. Housing first and system/community transformation. In G. Nelson, B. Kloos, & J. Ornelas (Eds.), *Community psychology and community mental health: Towards transformative change.* New York: Oxford University Press, in press.

Goering, P., & Wasylenki, D. (2003). The use of multiple roles to maximize the utilization of outcome research. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 16*(4), 324–329.

Graham, I., Logan, J., Harrison, M., Straus, S., Tetroe, J., Caswell, W., et al. (2006). Lost in knowledge translation: time for a map? *The Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions, 26,* 13–24.

Greenhalgh, T., & Russell, J. (2006). Reframing evidence synthesis as rhetorical action in the policy making drama. *Health Policy, 1*(2), 34–42.

Hilgartner, S., & Bosk, C. L. (1988). The rise and fall of social problems: a public arenas model. *The American Journal of Sociology, 94*(1), 53.

Humphreys, K., & Rappaport, J. (1993). From community mental health to the war on drugs. *American Psychologist, 48*(8), 892–901.

Jacobson, N., Butterill, D., & Goering, P. (2004). Organizational factors that influence university-based researchers' engagement in knowledge transfer activities. *Science Communication, 25*(3), 246–259.

Kingdon, J. W. (2003). *Agendas, alternatives & public policies.* New York: Longman Press.

Kirby, M., & Keon, W. (2006). *Out of the shadows at last: Transforming mental health, mental illness and addiction services in Canada.* Ottawa, ON: The Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science & Technology.

Kothari, M. (2007). *Report of the United Nations special rapporteur on housing.* Geneva: United Nations.

Lehman, A. F. (2010). Adopting evidence-based practices–our hesitation waltz. *Schizophrenia Bulletin, 36*(1), 1–2.

Lomas, J. (2007). The in-between world of knowledge brokering. *British Medical Journal, 334,* 129–132.

Macnaughton, E., Nelson, G., Piat, M., Eckerle Curwood, S., & Egalité, N. (2010). *Conception of the mental health commission of Canada's At Home/Chez Soi project.* Toronto: Mental Health Commission of Canada.

Mintrom, M., & Norman, P. (2009). Policy entrepreneurship and policy change. *Policy Studies Journal, 37*(4), 649–667.

Mitton, S., Adair, C., McKenzie, E., Patton, S., & Perry, B. (2007). Knowledge transfer & exchange: review and synthesis of the literature. *The Milbank Quarterly, 5*(4), 729–768.

Nelson, G., Aubry, T., & Lafrance, A. (2007). A review of the literature on the effectiveness of housing and support, assertive community treatment, and intensive case management interventions for persons with mental illness who have been homeless. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 77*(3), 350–361.

Oxman, A., Lavis, J., Lewin, S., & Fretheim, A. (2009). SUPPORT Tools for evidence-informed health Policymaking (STP) 1: what is evidence-informed policy-making. *Health Research Policy and Systems, 7*(Suppl 1), S1.

Rochefort, D. (1997). *From poorhouses to homelessness: Policy analysis and mental health care.* Westport, CT: Auburn House.

Russell, J., Greenhalgh, T., Byrne, E., & McDonnell, J. (2008). Recognizing rhetoric in health care policy analysis. *Journal of Health Services Research & Policy, 13*(1), 40–46.

Sabatier, P. A. (1988). An advocacy coalition framework of policy change and the role of policy-oriented learning therein. *Policy Sciences, 21*(2), 129.

Stanhope, V., & Dunn, K. (2011). The curious case of housing first: the limits of evidence based policy. *International Journal of Law & Psychiatry, 34,* 275–282.

Tiernan, A., & Burke, T. (2002). A load of old garbage: applying garbage–can theory to contemporary housing policy. *Australian Journal of Public Administration, 61*(3), 86.

Tsemberis, S., Gulcur, L., & Nakae, M. (2004). Housing First, consumer choice, and harm reduction for homeless individuals with a dual diagnosis. *American Journal of Public Healt, 94*(4), 651–656.

Waddell, C., Lavis, J. N., Abelson, J., Lomas, J., Shepherd, C. A., Bird-Gayson, T., et al. (2005). Research use in children's mental health policy in Canada: maintaining vigilance amid ambiguity. *Social Science & Medicine, 61*(8), 1649–1657.

Ward, V., Smith, S., House, A., & Hamer, S. (2012). Exploring knowledge exchange: a useful framework for practice and policy. *Social Science & Medicine, 74*(3), 297–304.

Wiktorowicz, M. E. (2005). Restructuring mental health policy in Ontario: deconstructing the evolving welfare state. *Canadian Public Administration, 48*(3), 386–412.