



A test case of theories of the policy process: what role does evidence play?

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Overview of PhD

- Comparing bowel cancer screening (BCS) policies in Australia, NZ and the UK.
- Looking at the how the role of evidence may vary across different contexts.
- In particular, do the political institutions and decision-making processes determine how evidence is used in BCS policy?



Evidence in policy

Many theories about how research evidence is used in policy, including:

- Knowledge (or expert) driven
- Problem solving
- Interactive
- Political
- Tactical
- Enlightenment.



Policy process frameworks

There are also many frameworks for thinking about how the policy process works. Some focus more on structural components, while others emphasise the role of policy actors.

- Policy cycle
- Institutional rational choice
- Multiple streams
- Interests and institutions
- Advocacy coalition



Four major stages of BCS policy development:

STAGE 1: MAKING A CASE FOR EXAMINING BCS

- Evidence fundamental to getting BCS on the agenda.
- Agree to government review.

STAGE 2: EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE FOR BCS

- Evidence still key, but need to prove it would work locally.
- Agree to Pilot.

STAGE 3: WILL BCS WORK IN AUSTRALIA?

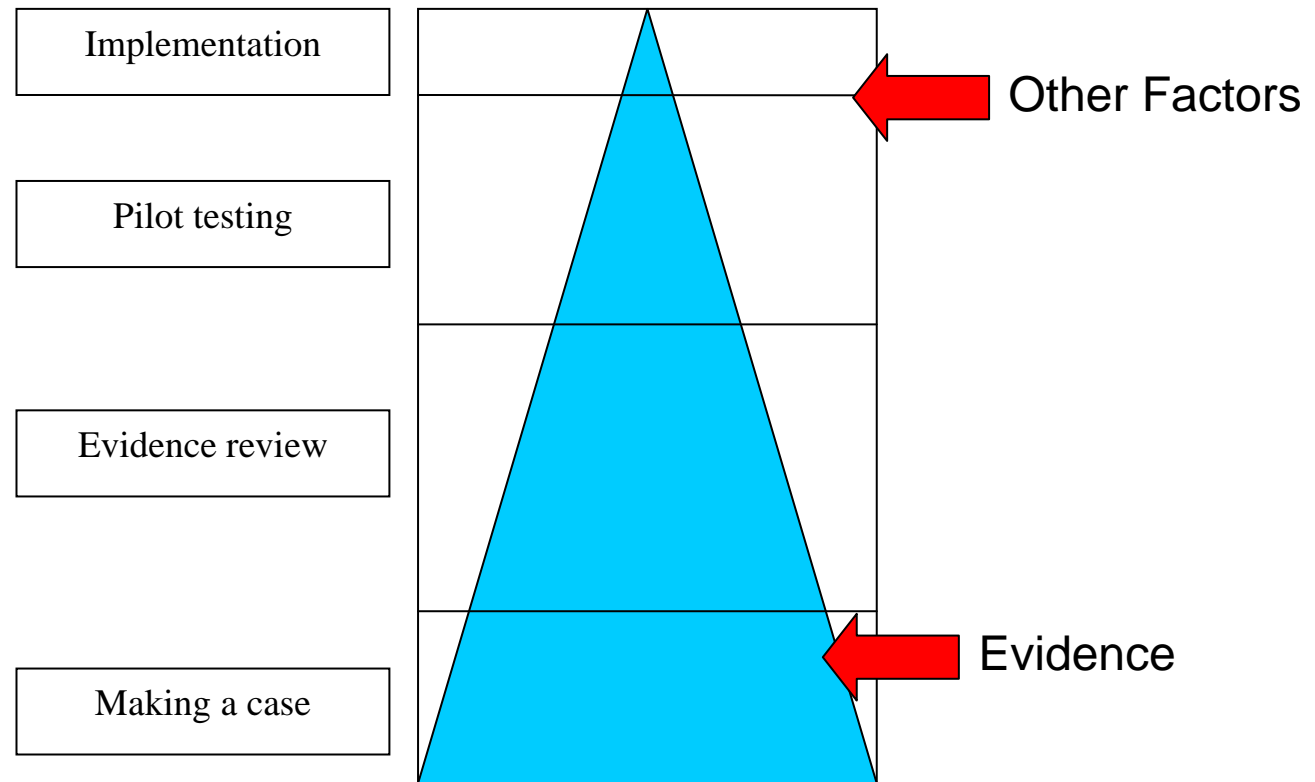
- Pilot found BCS was acceptable, feasible and cost-effective, but Government control over the type of evidence increasing.
- Recommended full roll-out.

STAGE 4: IMPLEMENTING BCS IN AUSTRALIA

- Limited roll-out only.
- Age groups selected on the basis of what they could afford.



Evidence use in each stage



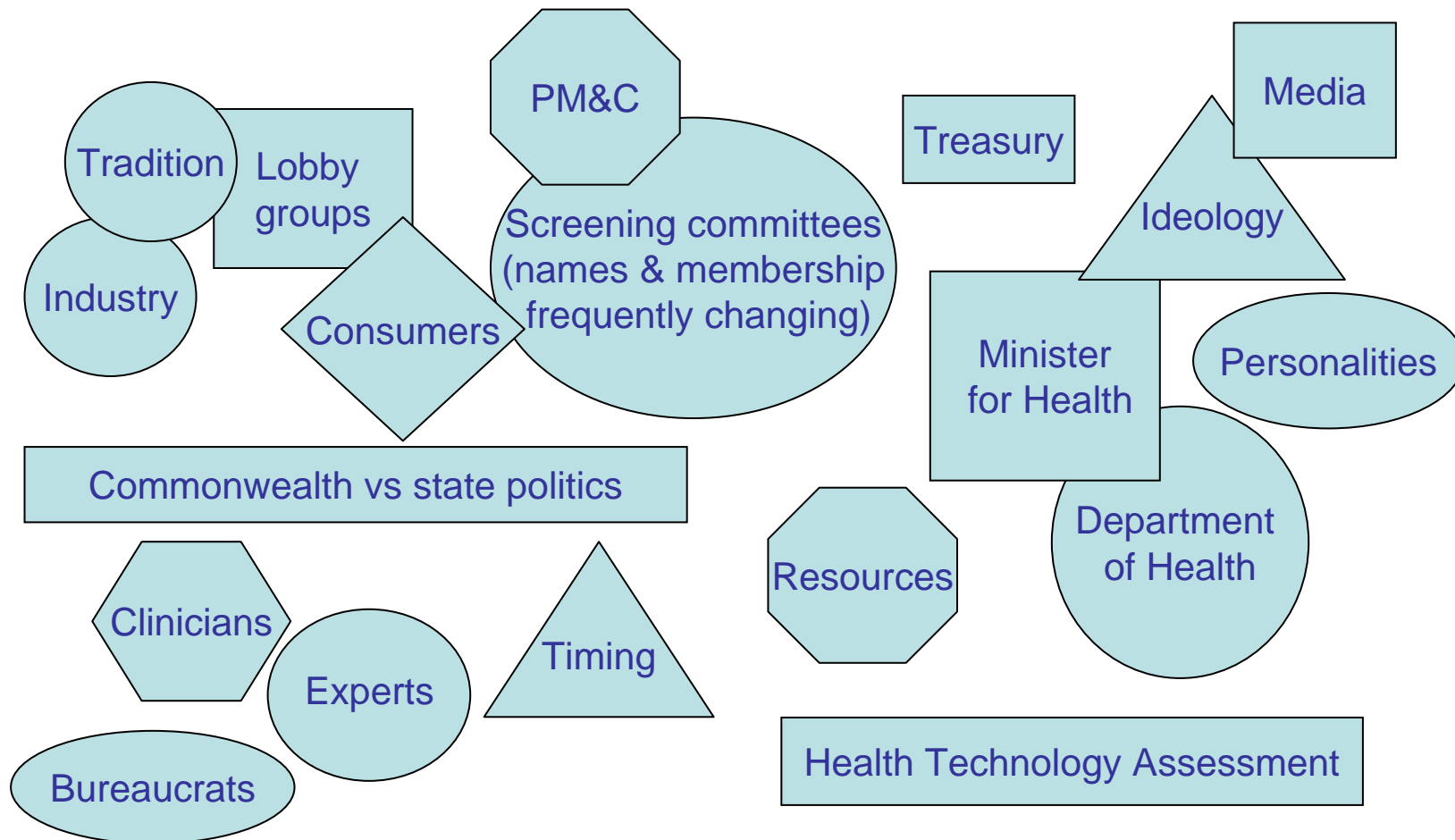


Why might evidence become less important?

- Evidence is important in getting a policy on the agenda, but then other factors limit the influence of evidence:
 - institutional (eg budget constraints, intergovernmental conflict)
 - political (eg opportunity costs, not a vote winner)
 - personal (eg mistrust of experts or advisors, control issues)
- Inverse relationship between the level of decision-making authority and the use of evidence?
- Advisory committees rely heavily on experts and evidence to make recommendations.
- High level decision-makers are more interested in how policy options fit in with other department or government objectives or priorities (the “helicopter view”).

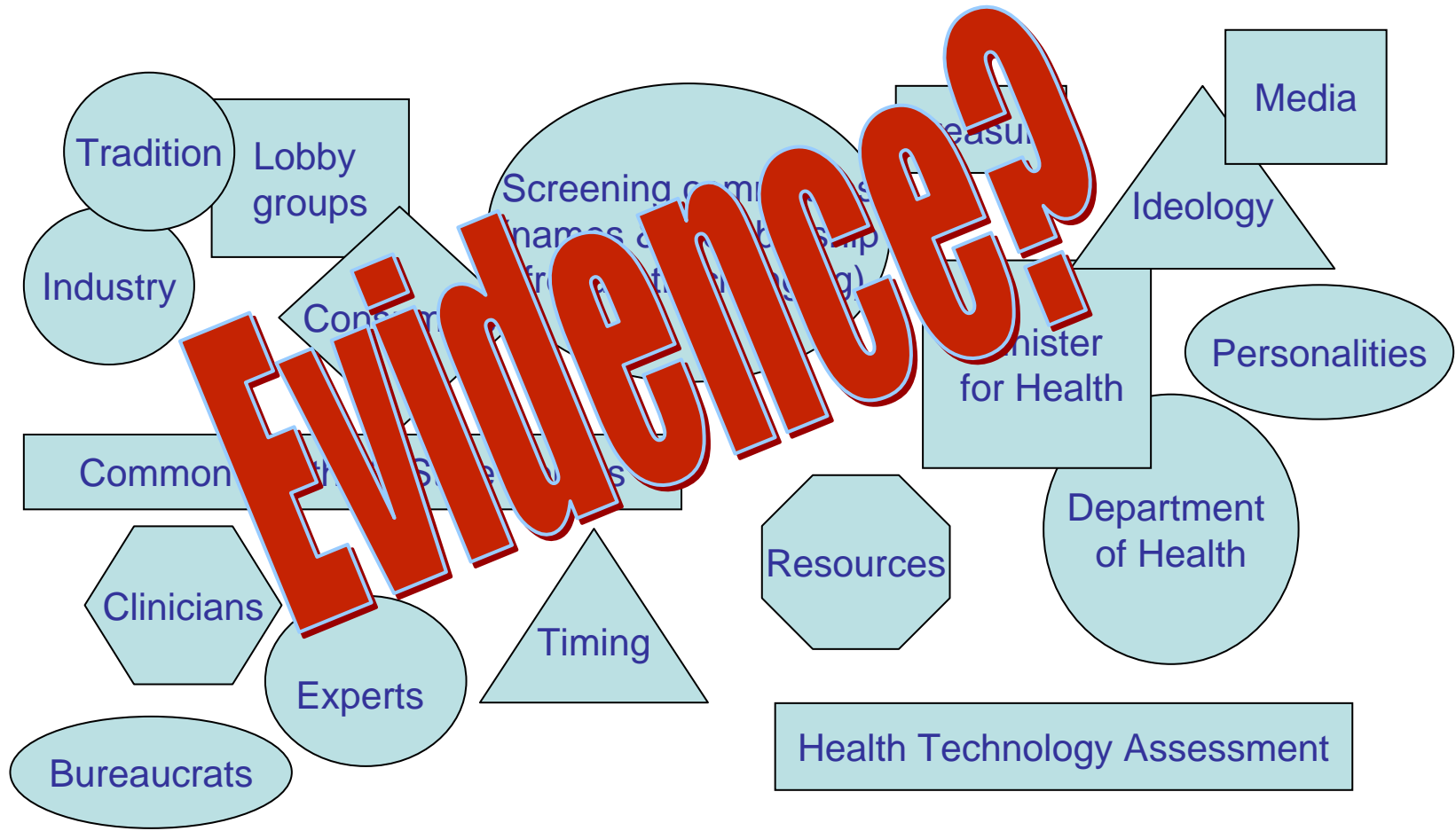


Factors influencing screening policy





School of Public Health





Possible Implications

- When asked “what would it take to get a full BCS program?”, most respondents listed several factors that would need to align.
- If research evidence is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for policy-making, maybe attempts at integrating research and policy are doomed to failure.
- Should advocates of evidence-informed policy focus on alternative options such as utilising the media and public support to frame the desired policy as a vote winner?