

Perspectives of a Public Health Leader: Potential and Real Utility of Modeling in Decision-Making

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Background

- Most **public health decision-making** (policy options and decision-making) occurs within governments in Canada
- Governments look to their public health leaders to provide **evidence** in support of **options for policies and programs**
- **Decisions are usually made by elected officials** (eg, immunization programs)

Challenges

- **Data are often lacking** on potential effectiveness and impact
- **Timeframes** are often extremely tight
- **Policy decisions** may not have been anticipated

Challenges - II

- Modelers are often working in **academic settings**
- Government public health leaders are often **highly reactive and driven by issues management**
- **Relationships** between public health leaders and modelers may not be in place

Example: Influenza

- Seasonal versus pandemic influenza
- Special challenges: surveillance; variability of vaccine effectiveness across populations and annually; vaccine acceptability; achieving high immunization coverage
- **Key message** – cannot introduce anything new during an emergency due to logistics and acceptability

Example: Immunization Programs

- Human Papilloma Virus Vaccine for males
 - How many cases would be averted
 - Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness of various strategies (QALY <\$50,000)
- Herpes Zoster Vaccine
 - How many cases would be averted
 - Cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness of various adult immunization strategies

Key Messages

- **Develop relationships** with senior public health leaders
- To achieve impact, **anticipate and understand** the government agenda, as well as timelines
- **Work with public health leaders** to ensure that the right issues are being addressed by modeling, and that **assumptions for models are considered to be realistic and comprehensive**

And Remember ...

- Accept that the results of your research, regardless of how sound it might be, might not win the day ...
- Many considerations go into **policy development, options** and ultimately, the **decisions** that are made ...