

Economic Evaluation: Can it GoWell with Public Policy?

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ABSTRACT

In a resource limited environment, it is important to determine whether a proposed programme constitutes a good use of scarce resources. Economic evaluation provides a framework to approach and inform difficult decisions about the best use of limited resources, through an assessment of both the costs and outcomes associated with a proposed programme.

However, complex public health interventions, including housing regeneration projects such as GoWell, do not readily lend themselves to the application of established economic evaluation techniques because their outcomes are complex and varied. This paper examines the issues associated with conducting economic evaluations of complex public health interventions and suggests some potential solutions. The issues explored include the diverse nature of outcomes, use of randomisation, collection of cost data, use of comparators, identifying and defining interventions and the timescale of data collection. Within the paper, the issues and potential solutions are explored through the use of case studies of economic evaluations of public health interventions currently being undertaken in the fields of housing, urban regeneration and physical activity.

Key Words: economic evaluation, public health