

Public engagement in health policymaking for older adults:

A systematic search and scoping review

Key Points

- ✓ **Public engagement** in policymaking is believed to improve the way governments respond to the needs and preferences of their citizens, resulting in better policy outcomes.
- ✓ Public engagement initiatives in health policymaking for older adults involved a broad range of participants, beyond just older adults themselves.
- ✓ The most reported engagement approach was one-way communication.
- ✓ Many articles did not describe the impacts of public engagement initiatives. Formal impact evaluations were infrequent.

What is this research about?

With the global population aging, increased attention has been given to developing health policies that can support the needs of older adults. One way to ensure these policies align with older adults' needs and priorities is by involving them in policymaking. However, **ageist** stereotypes often suggest that older adults are restricted in their ability to comprehend complex policy information and participate in such engagement initiatives.

In this scoping review, we aim to describe public engagement initiatives designed to help inform health policymaking for older adults and their impacts.

How was this research carried out?






Researchers searched six electronic databases for English-language literature on public engagement in health policymaking for older adults, spanning from the inception of the databases to Spring 2022. The outcomes of interest included: participants, engagement methods and approaches, and reported impacts. Older adult partners from the [McMaster Collaborative for Health and Aging](#) provided strategic advice throughout this research to enhance its relevance and meaningfulness for older adults.

Results

- 38 articles were included. More than half of the engagement initiatives were conducted with the goal of directly supporting policymaking processes. Most initiatives focused on improving the delivery of health services.
- Engagement initiatives involved a diverse range of participants. Individual older adults were the most common; advocacy organizations also frequently participated. In some cases, older adults were the sole participant group, while other initiatives involved multiple audiences. Notably, 11 engagement initiatives did not specifically target older adults for participation yet were intended to shape policymaking for older adults. Most articles did not report engaging marginalized populations.
- Engagement approaches ranged from one-way communication types ('listen' and 'consult'), where engagement organizers provided participants with information or sought their feedback, to more interactive participation ('deliberate' and 'collaborate'), where participants played an active role. The most common approach was 'consult', where participants provided input into proposed policies or programs through methods like consultation meetings, interviews, and surveys.
- Formal evaluations of engagement were infrequent. Reported impacts were mostly related to immediate outcomes (e.g., the development of policy tools). Impacts related to participants (e.g., acquisition of skills and knowledge) were less common.



Figure. Number of public engagement initiatives by engagement type

Engagement type and number	Definition
 Share (n=4)	One-way communication in which engagement organizers provide information to the public to help them understand the policy issues at hand.
 Consult (n=26)	Engagement organizers get feedback from the public on proposed policies.
 Deliberate (n=11)	The public discusses a policy issue and explores solutions with engagement organizers.
 Collaborate (n=12)	The public and other stakeholders partner to develop and apply solutions for policy issues.
 Mixed (n=9)	More than one type of engagement is organized around a specific engagement initiative.

Recommendations

- Engaging a diverse range of older adults, including socially marginalized populations, is critical to develop policies that meet their needs effectively.
- For complex topics, innovative approaches are needed that combine different methods to effectively engage with older adults.
- Supporting engagement infrastructure (e.g., capacity-building training, feedback loops) will enhance participants' trust, willingness, and capacity to contribute their expertise to policymaking.
- Evaluation is crucial for demonstrating the value of engagement, improving future practices, and motivating participants through validation of their contributions.



Conclusions

This study provides evidence that older adults can contribute to health policymaking designed for them. Meaningful engagement can happen through suitable engagement approaches and methods.

Citation: You J, Chan Carusone S, Ganann R, MacNeil M, Whitmore C, Dafel A, Dhamanaskar R, Ling E, Dingman L, Falbo A.T, Kirk M, Luyckx J, Petrie P, Weldon D, Boothe K, Wilson M, Abelson J on behalf of the McMaster Collaborative for Health and Aging. (2023) Public engagement in health policymaking for older adults: a systematic search and scoping review. Research brief.

Contact: Julia Abelson, email: abelsonj@mcmaster.ca



Collaborative for
Health & Aging

For more information, visit:

collaborative-aging.mcmaster.ca