

# SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT

## A Framework and Measurement Tool for Chronic Disease Programs

Center for Tobacco Policy Research, George Warren Brown School of Social Work, Washington University in St. Louis

Sarah Schell  
Douglas Luke  
Stephanie Herbers  
Michael Elliott

## BACKGROUND

*Sustainability of evidence-based public health interventions can often be a challenge for implementation research, as the sustainability of programs or other interventions is often not considered until just before funding ends.* There are a number of factors that contribute to sustainability beyond funding. However, in the field of chronic disease prevention research, there are very few tools for assessing sustainability of programs at the state or community level.

The goals of this poster presentation are to:

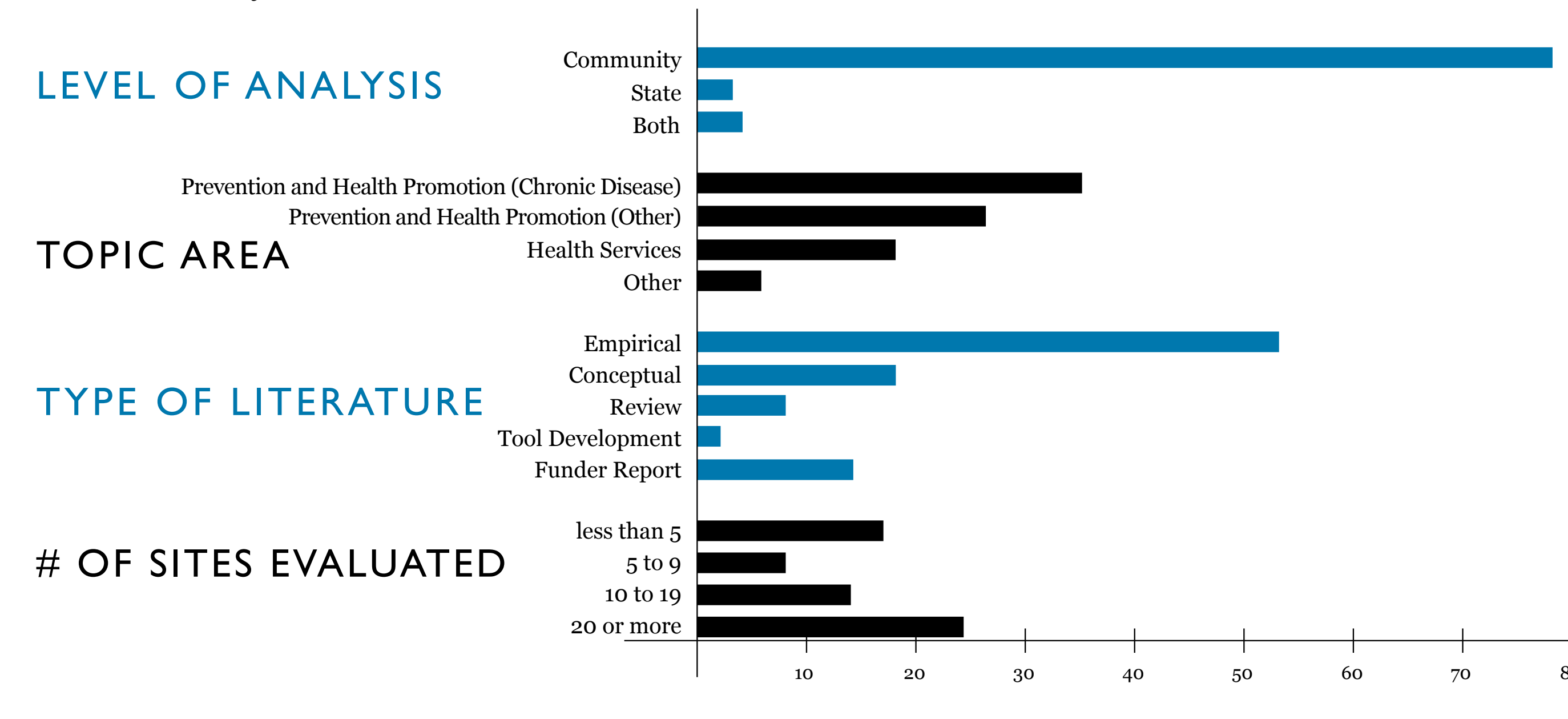
- Outline the steps taken to develop a *comprehensive framework* for program sustainability; and
- Present a sustainability assessment tool for use by *state or local-level* chronic disease programs.

## SURVEY OF THE FIELD

A review was conducted to describe the existing empirical literature on the factors that influence sustainability in public health, and inform the development of the sustainability framework. With most dissemination and implementation research stopping at the point of initial adoption, the literature on sustainability is fragmented and has not developed a universal terminology, including a definition of sustainability. The current literature spans nearly 20 years and represents an array of public health issue areas including tobacco control, physical activity and heart health education, behavioral health, diabetes, and asthma. Results and reports of public health program implementation suggest that the long-term sustainability of a program is influenced by the interaction of environmental, organizational, and programmatic factors over time.

### LITERATURE REVIEW SUPPORTED FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

Characteristics of Literature

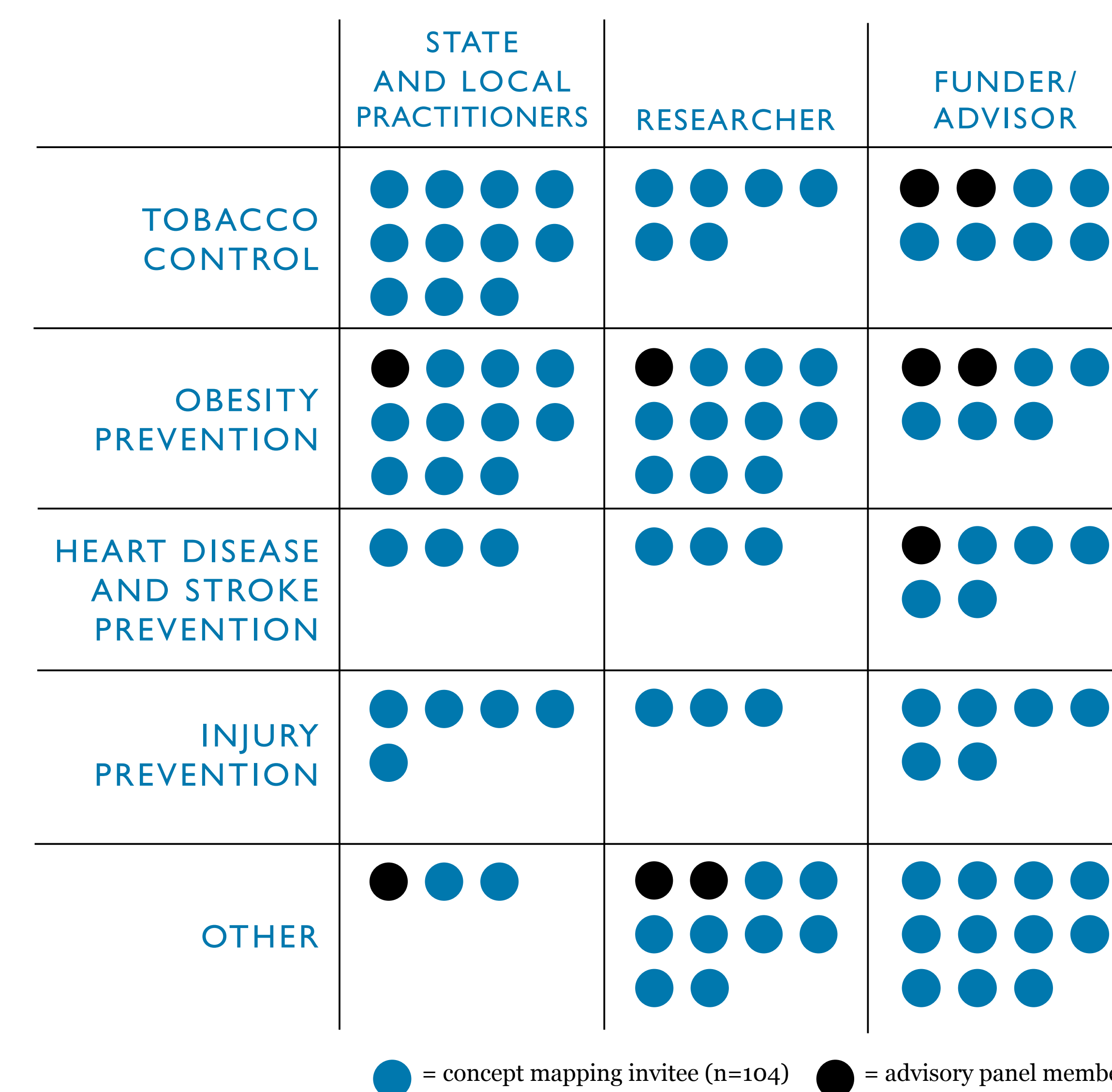


## EXPERT-INFORMED INVESTIGATION

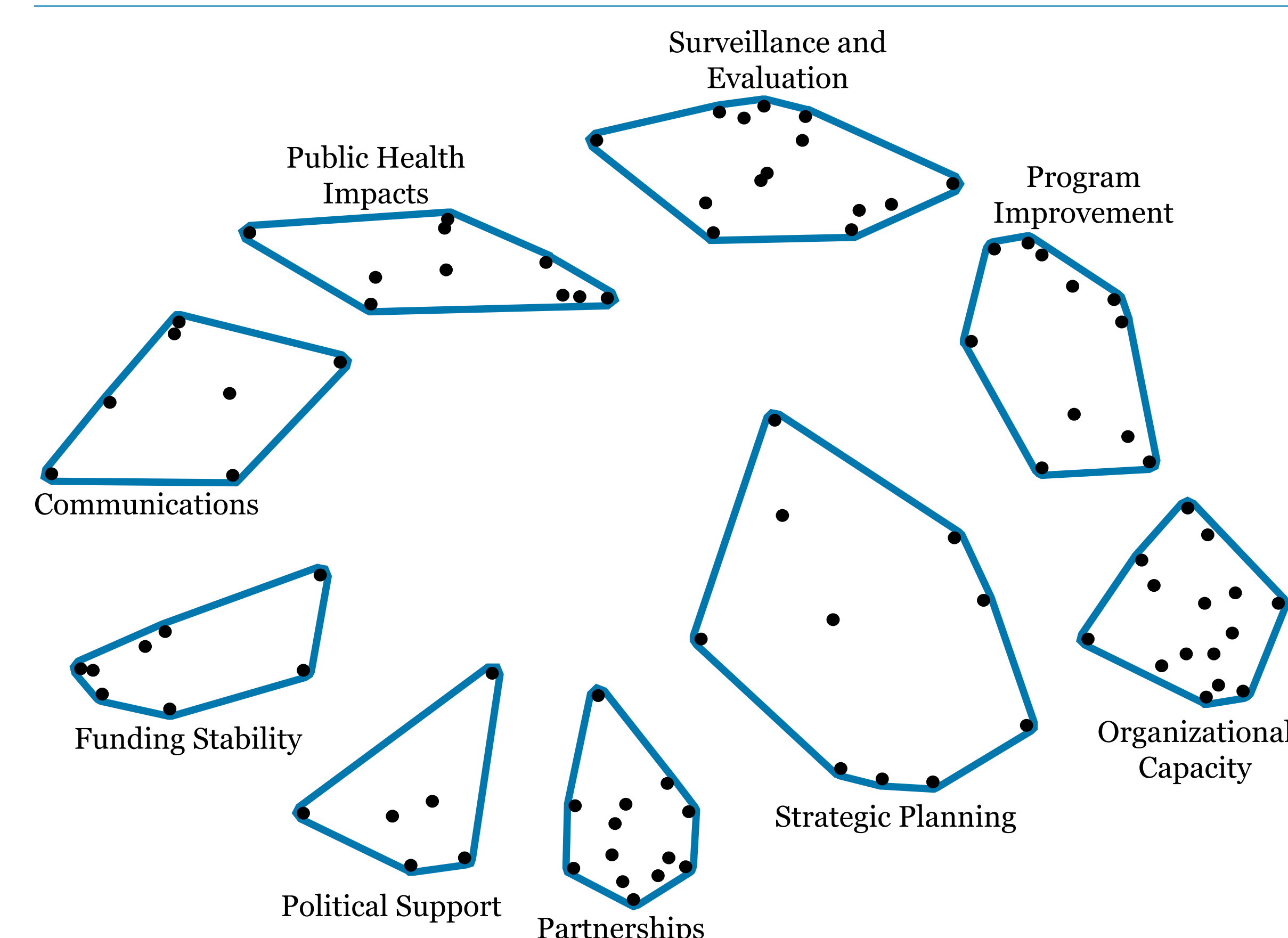
To ensure that the framework and tool would be relevant across public health areas, we sought input from public health professionals working across multiple disciplines and settings. A participant matrix was developed to track the range of expertise. An eight-member advisory committee was also established to guide the design and implementation of the project.

Concept mapping was used to establish the sustainability framework. Concept mapping is a mixed methods approach that combines qualitative group processes (e.g., brainstorming, categorizing ideas) with statistical analyses to help a group describe its ideas and represent them visually. The concept mapping process combined input from diverse stakeholders and organized the information into nine sustainability domains.

### RECEIVED DIVERSE INPUT ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND SETTINGS



### CONCEPT MAPPING PRODUCED 9 AREAS



## FRAMEWORK AND TOOL DEVELOPMENT

The statements created by the concept mapping participants were systematically reduced into a set of indicators to measure sustainability. Using an integrated empirical and rational approach, each item was analyzed individually to determine if it should be included in the final assessment tool. The structure of the framework and use of each indicators was strongly supported by the literature.

The tool asks respondents to rate their program in each of the nine sustainability domains. Users indicate the extent to which their program has each item, choosing a response along a seven point rating scale (1= to little or no extent, 7= to a very great extent).

### SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK



### SUSTAINABILITY DOMAINS

- FUNDING STABILITY**  
making long-term plans based on a stable funding environment
- POLITICAL SUPPORT**  
internal and external political environment which influences program funding, initiatives, and acceptance
- PARTNERSHIPS**  
the connection between program and community
- ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY**  
the resources needed to effectively manage the program and its activities
- PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT**  
the ability to adapt and improve in order to ensure effectiveness
- SURVEILLANCE AND EVALUATION**  
monitoring and evaluation of process and outcome data associated with program activities
- COMMUNICATIONS**  
the strategic dissemination of program outcomes and activities with stakeholders, decision-makers, and the public
- PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACTS**  
the program's effect on the health attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in the area it serves
- STRATEGIC PLANNING**  
the process that defines program direction, goals, and strategies

## DISCUSSION

This is the first empirically developed sustainability assessment tool designed for state and local-level chronic disease programs. The program sustainability framework and assessment tool are grounded in the literature and results of the concept mapping. The tool provides public health programs and their partners with a reliable way to measure sustainability after initial implementation. Assessment results will help programs, researchers, and funders identify areas of strength and challenge regarding the processes and structures that need to be in place to increase a program's sustainability.

### SUSTAINABILITY TOOL SUMMARY

- **9** Domains
- **63** Indicators
- Used for **planning** and **evaluation**
- Designed for **state** and **local-level** programs
- Applicable across **chronic disease areas**

ACCESS THE TOOL AT  
<http://ctpr.wustl.edu/sustainability>

4th Annual NIH Conference on the Science of Dissemination and Implementation  
March 21-22, 2011

Funding for this project was provided by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT  
Sarah Schell  
sschell@wustl.edu

