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Citizen Science for public health

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Abstract

Community engagement in public health policy is easier said than done. One reason is that public health policy is produced in a complex process resulting in policies that may appear not to link up to citizen perspectives. We therefore address the central question as to whether citizen engagement in knowledge production could enable inclusive health policy making. Building on non-health work fields, we describe different types of citizen engagement in scientific research, or 'Citizen Science'. We describe the challenges that Citizen Science poses for public health, and how these could be addressed. Despite these challenges, we expect that Citizen Science or similar approaches such as participatory action research and 'popular epidemiology' may yield better knowledge, empowered communities, and improved community health. We provide a draft framework to enable evaluation of Citizen Science in practice, consisting of a descriptive typology of different kinds of Citizen Science and a causal framework that shows how Citizen Science in public health might benefit both the knowledge produced as well as the 'Citizen Scientists' as active participants.

Keywords: citizen science, public health policy, community participation, participatory research, participator

Full text

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