

Public Health and Planning 101: An Education Module for Public Health and Planning Professionals in Ontario

Survey for Planning Professionals – Highlights

A survey was sent out to planning professionals in Ontario to inform the development of an education module for public health and planning professionals working on the built environment. A total of 301 planning professionals responded to the built environment survey that was administered in February 2012. All survey respondents were planning professionals in Ontario with either Full or Provisional membership with the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI). The majority of respondents are currently (or were recently) at the time employed in the public sector (80.7%), while 19.3% are employed (or recently employed) in the private sector. Survey respondents primarily worked in the areas of land use planning/development review (64.8%), policy frameworks (master plans, community sustainability plans, official plans etc.) (53.5%), environment (26.2%), community engagement and capacity building (25.2%), urban design (19.6%), and transportation (15.9%) (Figure 1).

The majority of planning professionals indicated that the relationship between the built environment and human health is informally considered as part of policy design or decision making (62.5%), while a small proportion of planning professionals indicated that it was formally considered (27.2%) or not considered at all (14.6%). Respondents identified air quality, water quality, and physical activity as their top three public health factors that are impacted by the built environment in Ontario.

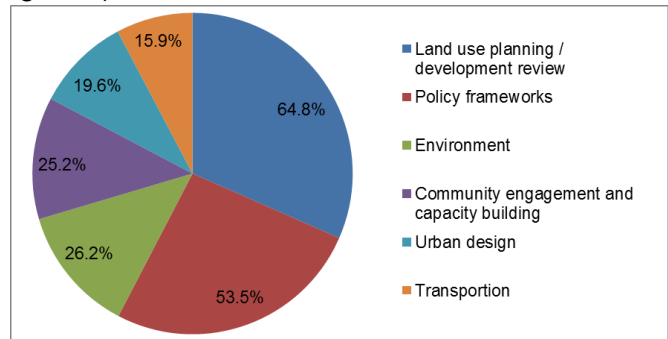


Figure 1. Planning professionals primary areas of focus (n=301).

Planning professionals identified several barriers that their local governments face in working with public health on the built environment (Figure 2). The most commonly identified barriers included a lack of understanding regarding application of the public health mandate in planning practice (59.1%), collaboration with public health not being a priority/requirement (52.8%), and limited human resources (51.5%).

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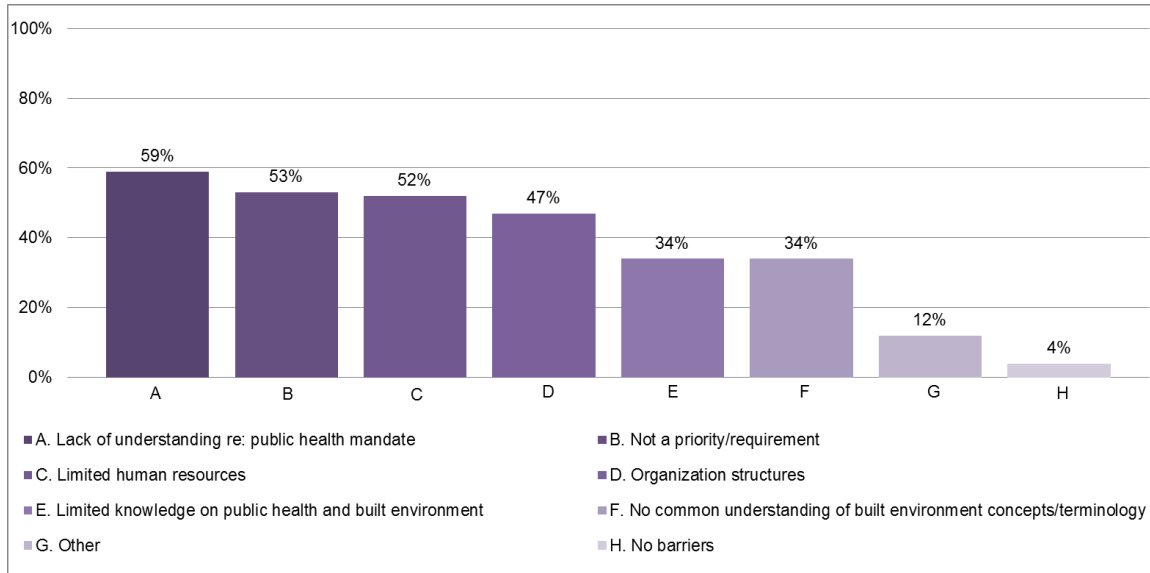


Figure 2. Barriers to working with public health on the built environment in Ontario, 2012 (n=301).

Planning professionals were also asked to identify ideal roles for public health staff when working with planning professionals on the built environment (Table 1). Planning professionals identified the following areas where public health professionals can make the most effective contribution to influencing the built environment: Official Plans (63.8%), Pedestrian and Cycling Master Plans (31.9%), Community Sustainability Plans (29.6%), Transportation Master Plans (27.6%), Secondary Plans (24.9%), and Parks, Recreation and Culture Master Plans (24.3%) (data not shown).

Table 1. Ideal roles for public health professionals when working with planning professionals on the built environment, 2012 (n=301)

Ideal roles	Percentage
Provide consultation to planning	81.4%
Partners on specific projects	65.8%
Research/evaluation	65.1%
Reviews/comments on planning initiatives	63.1%
Partners on specific committees	58.5%
Advocacy role	49.2%
Other	4%

Planning professionals were asked to rate their knowledge of public health in relation to: (i) public health roles and responsibilities; (ii) public health legislation and standards; (iii) organizational structure of public health across the province; and (iv) public health terminology/concepts related to the built environment. Planning professionals had limited knowledge of public health legislation and standards (40.2%) and public health organizational structures (36.2%).

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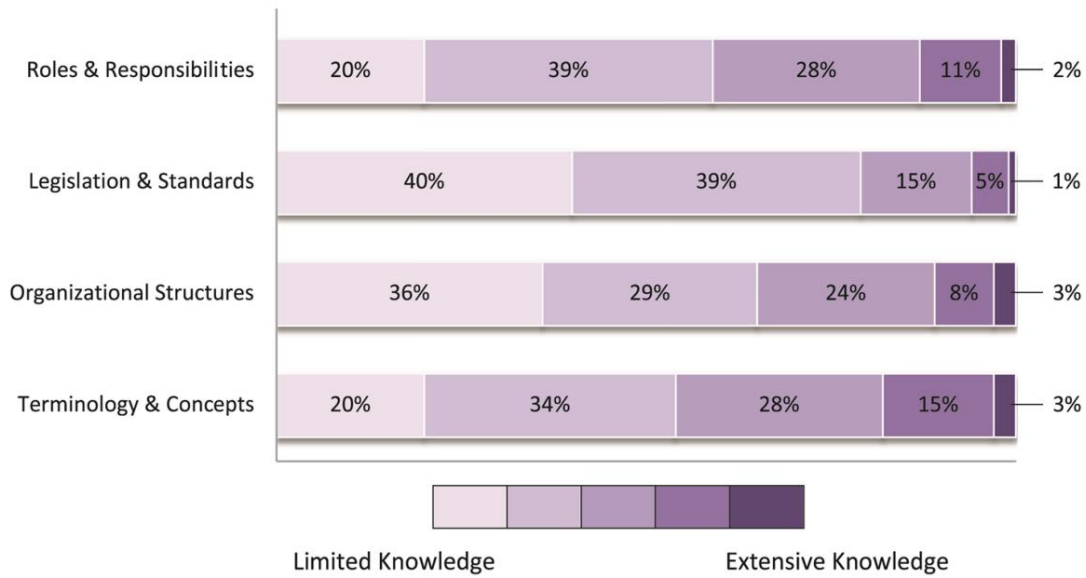


Figure 3. Knowledge of planning professionals on public health (n=297).

Planning professionals indicated that workshops, webinars, and reports or documents would be their preferred learning method to bridge the gap between public health and planning. The majority of planning professionals (85.7%) agreed that they should be working together with public health professionals on the built environment. Through this survey to planning professionals, it is clear that collaboration with public health professionals is important to further the work on healthy built environments.