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Author

Hughes, Roger, Baillie, Elizabeth

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Capacity building as a core strategy in community-level public health nutrition intervention: The Growing Years Project as a case study

Libby Baillie¹, Roger Hughes¹.

¹ Griffith University, Gold Coast, QLD 4217 Australia

Capacity-building and capacity have been terms that have increasingly become part of the public health vernacular since the Jakarta statement on health promotion and relate to the ability of individuals, groups, organisations and communities to achieve objectives such as improved health. Capacity building as a strategy to enhance the performance of public health nutrition practice has received little attention in the public health nutrition literature. Few attempts have been made to develop frameworks and tools to assess and evaluate public health capacity in community-based nutrition interventions. In response to this gap in the public health nutrition practice toolkit, a capacity assessment and evaluation tool has been developed to support a community-based nutrition and physical activity promotion project targeting mothers and infants being conducted on the Gold Coast in Queensland (The Growing Years Project). The evaluation tool developed for the Growing Years Project has been based on a conceptual framework for capacity building developed from the literature. This tool measures determinants of public health capacity across eight domains including resource allocation, community development, public health intelligence, leadership, partnerships, workforce development, organisational, and project management quality. A mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods has been used to provide evidence for the baseline capacity evaluation including local service audits, stakeholder analysis, semi-structured interviews with service providers, consultations with the target group, and a quantitative partnership satisfaction survey. The use of this tool in strategy planning and evaluation has applications for public health nutrition practice.

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