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Cancer control planning: self-assessment for pre-planning, development, implementation and evaluation of national cancer control plans

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Abstract

The development of cancer control plans as a clearly defined concept began in the U.S. in the early 1990s. On an international level, the same concept has been described as “national cancer control planning” or national cancer control plan (NCCP) development and implementation. Recent efforts by the National Cancer Institute’s Center for Global Health and its partners have increased international and country-level interest in NCCPs. Central to the development of these plans has been a need for countries to understand the crucial factors and foundational elements necessary to develop and successfully implement a national cancer plan. This article describes the process by which a tool developed by the International Cancer Control Partnership (ICCP) helps countries and international partners assess their efforts to develop and implement a NCCP.

Keywords

National cancer control plan; Comprehensive cancer control; Cancer plan implementation; International cancer control

Introduction: emergence of national cancer control plans and the need for technical assistance

The development of cancer control plans as a clearly defined concept began in the US in the early 1990s. On an international level, the same concept has been described as “national cancer control planning” or national cancer control plan (NCCP) development and implementation. The Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) defines an NCCP as a “sustainable strategic plan to control cancer, based on the country’s cancer burden, cancer risk factor prevalence, and the resources available to implement the plan in the context of the socio-economic environment and healthcare system in that country” [1].

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Comprehensive cancer control (CCC), as the concept is known in the US, is an “integrated and coordinated approach to reducing cancer incidence, morbidity, and mortality through prevention, early detection, treatment, rehabilitation and palliation” [2]. CCC as a strategic approach to addressing cancer issues within communities (at any level, from cities to nations) is characterized by the following:

- Collaboration among diverse multi-sector stakeholders to reduce duplication of effort and maximize existing resources
- Use of data to drive priority actions and use of research results to identify evidence-based interventions to implement those priorities
- Development and implementation of a written strategic plan that is reflective of the community’s cultural context and health system to guide efforts

The following graphic (Fig. 1) depicts the typical content of a CCC plan or NCCP. The plan is comprehensive, in that it covers the full continuum of cancer care, from prevention to survivorship. The plan includes broad goals, measurable objectives and evidence-based strategies to address each area of the continuum. The plan is supported by multi-sector stakeholders, informed by data, evidence and research findings, and includes evaluation measures to assess progress over time. Furthermore, a NCCP should articulate strategies to address cancer-related disparities.

In 2006, the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Cancer Society (ACS), the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and UICC began working together to move the CCC approach to an international level. CDC, ACS, NCI and UICC developed and delivered a series of trainings, called cancer control leadership forums (“Forums”) and patterned after similar opportunities offered in the U.S.

The first Forum was held in Latin America in 2006 [3]. Additional Forums were held in 2007 and 2008, with select countries. In 2013, NCI’s Center for Global Health began a renewed effort to engage countries in national cancer control planning efforts and restarted the Forums. Since then, several Forums have been conducted around the world [4, 5].

In 2012, NCI worked with its partners to establish the International Cancer Control Partnership (ICCP). The ICCP’s mission is to provide leadership, expertise and guidance to national cancer planning stakeholders and decision-makers in their efforts to develop, implement and evaluate data-driven, stakeholder-informed country-level NCCPs. The ICCP has been instrumental in delivery of the Forums and has established a web portal (<http://www.iccp-portal.org/>) with tools and resources to guide countries as they develop and implement national cancer plans [6].

Recent global efforts related to the importance of developing and implementing a national cancer plan have also emerged, including the adoption of the Cancer Resolution WHA 70.12 at the 70th Session of the World Health Assembly which urges member states to: “develop, as appropriate, and implement national cancer control plans that are inclusive of all age groups; that have adequate resources, monitoring and accountability; and that seek synergies and cost-efficiencies with other health interventions” [7].

The most recent World Health Organization (WHO) Cancer Control Global Snapshot 2015 report indicates that while 87% of countries have an existing policy, strategy or action plan for cancer, only 68% reported the plans were being implemented [8]. There is likely great variability among countries in terms of the comprehensiveness of the policy, strategy or action plan being implemented; i.e., not all cancer plans cover the continuum of cancer care from prevention to palliation [9].

As NCI and the ICCP have delivered Forums around the world in several regions, a common gap emerged in terms of countries understanding the crucial factors and foundational elements needed both to develop and successfully implement a national cancer plan. While several resources in the form of guides and tools existed to outline the planning process, inform plan components, and describe the need for a national cancer plan and the role governments and non-governmental organizations could play in addressing a country's cancer burden, there was still the need to provide support for the key components countries need to put in place to set the foundation for developing and implementing a successful national cancer control plan.

Purpose of the assessment tool

The assessment tool, which is now available for download and use from the ICCP web portal (<http://www.iccp-portal.org/resources/national-cancer-control-plan-development-and-implementation-assessment-tool>) is designed to help countries systematically assess their NCCP plan from different perspectives. These include:

1. Pre-planning and the planning process

How the NCCP was/is being developed. This part of the assessment has the user look at who is supporting development of the plan, as well as providing input into the plan. Key areas include assuring a multi-sector group of key stakeholders are involved throughout the development and identifying and gathering relevant cancer data to inform the plan.

2. The contents of the national cancer plan

The assessment tool guides the user to ensure that the plan comprehensively addresses the cancer burden in the country, therefore, all points along the cancer continuum (prevention, screening, early detection, quality treatment and care, palliation and survivorship should be included in the plan). Goals, along with specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound (SMART) objectives and evidence-based interventions are the foundation and building blocks in the plan.

3. Post-planning and implementation

Implementation, evaluation and updating the plan are important milestones after the plan has been written. Specific plans for each of these areas should be discussed and the process for carrying them out is determined as the plan is developed, not as an afterthought.

NCI and its partners envisioned the assessment tool being used in the following ways:

- Individual countries using the tool to conduct a self-assessment of their plan development process, existing plan or plan implementation and update efforts
- Incorporating assessment tool components into technical assistance workshops designed to assist countries with developing and implementing national cancer control plans, such as Leadership Forums
- NCI and ICCP partners using the tool to help guide assistance to individual countries as they are developing national cancer plans, particularly as a basis for reviewing and providing feedback on the process of national cancer plan development

Development of the assessment tool

The NCI's Center for Global Health and Division of Cancer Control and Population Sciences worked with a sub-contractor, Strategic Health Concepts (SHC), to draft the assessment tool, beginning in January 2015. Several existing toolkits and guides describing critical elements of developing and implementing a cancer control plan were used to guide the development of the assessment tool. The primary resources that NCI and SHC consulted were: the World Health Organization's (WHO) *Cancer Control Knowledge into Action: WHO Guide for Effective Programs-Planning* [10]; the Union for International Cancer Control's (UICC) *Supporting National Cancer Control Planning: a Toolkit for Civil Society Organizations* [11]; and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) *Cancer Plan Self-Assessment Tool* [12].

As part of its Leadership Forum program [13], NCI adapted an existing assessment tool from the US Comprehensive Cancer Control National Partnership's *Nine Habits of Successful Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalitions* [14]. The *Nine Habits* self-assessment tool is designed to be used by a cancer control partnership or coalition to rate its level of functioning in several areas that are critical to implementation of a cancer plan. The *Nine Habits* assessment tool sections pertaining to leadership, partnership maintenance and sustainability, and plan implementation were adapted for several NCI-sponsored Leadership Forums described above.

Based on review of the resources named above, and prior NCI and SHC experience with adapting the *Nine Habits* assessment tool for the Leadership Forums, the following critical elements of plan development and implementation were identified: building support to develop a plan; building a partnership to guide plan development; determining cancer burden as well as cancer control strengths and opportunities to address the burden; developing a cancer plan (including the plan development process and plan content areas); implementing a cancer plan; monitoring and evaluation of cancer plan implementation; and, periodically updating a cancer plan. These elements were included as sections of the assessment tool. Specific activities critical to supporting these elements of plan development and implementation were identified and included in the tool as "components to address."

Because the tool would primarily be used as a self-assessment tool by countries, additional features were added such as matrices where users could indicate the extent to which they

have addressed the components, key action steps to begin or enhance their efforts in the component area, and key partners who would be responsible for taking action. Table 1, from the assessment tool, gives an example of how countries can use the tool to document how they have addressed a component and key actions steps. As the assessment tool was not intended to provide step-by-step advice for how to develop and implement a national cancer plan, but rather a self-assessment and problem-solving tool, a section was added with links to web-based resources that do provide “how-to” guidance.

Countries wishing to use the tool are at different stages in development and implementation of their national cancer control plans [15]; the tool therefore includes a “where to start” assessment, to help countries identify where to begin in the assessment tool, based on their current situation. Different scenarios are described that match potential starting points and are linked to suggestions for specific sections of the tool to use.

NCI and SHC drafted the assessment tool and solicited feedback from members of the International Cancer Control Partnership (ICCP), specifically UICC and CDC. Once the draft assessment tool was revised, initial feedback sessions and pilot testing was conducted with potential users of the tool, specifically representatives of organizations within countries who might be involved in developing and/or implementing a national cancer control plan.

Feedback on the initial draft of the assessment tool was gathered in March 2015 during the 7th International Conference on Health Issues in Arab Communities, held in Oman. During the conference, participants attended a one-day training, which was developed and delivered by NCI and its partners. The training focused on getting ready to develop a national cancer plan. The full initial draft of the assessment tool was reviewed during this training, and specific components of the tool pertaining to building support and partnerships for plan development and using data and other information to help develop a plan were piloted during the session. Based on feedback gathered in Oman, changes were made to the tool to strengthen its utility, especially related to partnership support and the use of data to support plan development.

A subsequent review and feedback session was held in conjunction with a Leadership Forum in the Caribbean region in May 2015. Ten cancer control leaders from five countries representing various organizations such as Ministries of Health, cancer centers, cancer societies, hospitals and academic institutes participated in the half-day review and feedback session in Barbados. During this session, the tool was reviewed and the full group worked through one component of the tool as an example of how it could be completed and the results used in country to plan specific actions. Then, participants worked with facilitators in small groups to discuss the tool and provide feedback on its clarity, utility, and relevance. Facilitators recorded feedback during the small group sessions. The participants individually completed a feedback form, indicating what they liked, what they would change how they would use the tool. Based on feedback gathered in Barbados, the following changes were made to the tool: the tool was reformatted to make specific elements and content easy to find and consideration of more connections between cancer and non-communicable disease (NCD) programs and partners were included. Participants indicated they would use the tool

to help organize plan development processes already underway, to evaluate and improve current plan content, and to guide plan implementation efforts.

During the review and feedback session in the Caribbean region in May 2015 comments from reviewers who are involved in cancer control planning were received and indicated receptivity to the assessment tool. All reviewers answered “yes” to the question of whether they would use the assessment tool. When asked the question “What are some specific ways you would use this assessment tool?” participants mentioned the following types of uses (Table 2).

Based on feedback gathered, countries see the assessment tool as being potentially useful in assisting cancer control planners in several aspects of their efforts to develop and implement national cancer plans.

Use of the assessment tool

The assessment tool is designed to be used by a variety of stakeholders both within a country for their own use, as well as by external supporters in the following ways:

Provides a roadmap for a country before the national cancer control planning process begins

A team of key cancer control stakeholders in the country can convene and use the assessment to understand and prepare themselves to go through the national cancer planning process. By reviewing the assessment tool prior to starting the planning process, the stakeholders can be proactive in their efforts and be realistic about the data, leadership support, time needed and comprehensiveness at the beginning of the process rather than having to go back after the plan is written and “fix” areas they did not address—both in the content of the plan and in the process by which it was developed.

Enables country stakeholders in the plan development and implementation process to objectively identify challenges and problem-solving around those challenges

The assessment allows users to identify areas of concerns by utilizing the assessment subject areas and statements to ask each other about progress and issues. Discussions can occur around these areas and how to improve or revise efforts. These discussions also create opportunities for accountability measures to be established, such as assigning key tasks with deadlines for completion. When these discussions do occur, it allows the group to make plans, assign responsibilities and provides a tool to follow-up on decisions made and responsibilities assigned.

Allows for structured guidance and feedback to countries during development and implementation of their plan

Structured feedback by stakeholders within a country or external to the country can be given as a country team proceeds through the process of developing and implementing their national cancer plan. For example, an organization that has been asked to provide technical assistance can use the assessment as a structured discussion tool and quickly determine areas

of the plan development or implementation process that were not completed, not executed well, or for which circumstances have changed and should be revisited. Challenges in key areas such as lack of stakeholder support, the need to identify priorities, leadership roles, and active partner engagement are often more easily identified or broached by an neutral third party, rather than stakeholders working within the country on the national plan.

Incorporates evaluation throughout the planning process

It is much more effective to plan for evaluation at the onset of the plan's development, and throughout its development, than retroactively consider how plan progress will be evaluated [16]. Identifying baseline and target measurements, and articulating how and when those measurements will be tracked while developing SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-Based) objectives within the plan is an essential element of a national plan.

Allows multiple entities offering technical assistance and practical guidance a way to systematically organize their feedback to countries

The assessment tool allows multiple organizations with different perspectives and expertise to conduct a combined assessment of a country's planning and implementation process. Different sections of the checklist can be assigned to different organizations, or each organization can review the full checklist and combine the resulting comments and provide them to the country in one document.

Conclusion

The importance of tailoring the cancer control planning process including the creation of a plan and its implementation and evaluation to country context is an important aspect of national cancer control planning efforts [11]. Different countries have diverse governance structures, healthcare systems, financial and infrastructure capacity, and cultures that come into play as countries seek to strengthen cancer prevention and control for their populations. The assessment tool described here was, therefore, developed to provide a framework for how countries (or states, provinces, etc.) can systematically approach different foundational aspects of the planning process to give them the best chance of success in implementation.

This framework for planning relies on an iterative approach whereby countries assess, re-assess, and continually strengthen the foundational elements of their planning processes including: political and community support; effective partnerships; collection and use of high-quality data; and monitoring and evaluation. Each of the sections of the assessment tool can, therefore, be used at various stages including as countries are initially discussing planning, during plan development, during implementation and evaluation, and then again when the plan is being updated. The tool is also designed to allow cancer control planners in countries to use sections relevant to their current context without having to complete sections that are not. Countries can therefore use or revisit specific sections at any point as the need arises. If, for example, a country's partnership is struggling to gain momentum or loses cohesion over time, the country planners can move directly to the section on "Building

a Diverse Partnership to Guide Plan Development” or the section on “Plan Implementation” that covers elements specific to partnership building during the implementation phase.

In addition to its value to in-country planners, the assessment tool is also intended to be supportive of groups or individuals that provide technical assistance to countries on cancer control planning. Similar to how countries themselves would use the tool, the tool’s design provides a framework for technical experts and external partners to approach their support of the planning process. The assessment tool’s envisioned use by external partners would be as a facilitative tool to assist countries in focusing on key aspects of planning and facilitating them coming to consensus internally on the path forward, rather than for the outside expert to do the planning. If used for such technical assistance, the tool could help provide consistency between different assistance efforts, particularly when countries are supported by multiple partners. Within ICCP technical assistance efforts, for example, use of the tool by all partners involved in a particular planning effort can help organize the work and discussions of each of the partner organizations as they design and deliver collaborative and coordinated technical assistance to a country.

As countries and global partners work together to fulfill the call to action from the World Health Assembly’s Cancer Resolution to “develop, as appropriate, and implement national cancer control plans” the assessment tool will be a critical resource for partners and countries alike. A recent review of NCCPs, conducted by the ICCP with leadership from WHO and UICC, indicates that several components included in the assessment tool are often lacking in NCCP, such as monitoring and evaluation and costing and/or budgeting of the plan [9]. Further refinement of the assessment tool and continued dissemination of the tool to countries as they develop and implement NCCPs will help support implementation of quality plans that are comprehensive, evidence-based, and have a greater potential for enabling stakeholders to reduce the burden of cancer in their country.

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Fig. 1.
Typical national cancer control plan content

Table 1

Completed example from the assessment tool

Components to address	Incorporated? Yes, partially or no	Action steps to get started or move forward (brief description if you answered partially or no)	Who is responsible?
We have identified a staff person(s) to lead development of the plan	Partially	We have a staff person identified within the Ministry of Health, however, that person is overextended. Our action step to help address this is to identify additional staff from partnership members to assist the MOH staff person	Organizations responsible: MOH, Cancer Society, Central Hospital

Source <https://www.iccp-portal.org/resources/national-cancer-control-plan-development-and-implementation-assessment-tool>

Table 2

Reviewer feedback: specific uses for the assessment tool

Establishing timelines, monitoring and evaluation
Advocating for local governments to use the tool
Building civil society capacity for contribution to national cancer control planning
Critically evaluating each step in the planning process to determine if the country is on the right track
Support for creating urgency in developing a cancer plan for our country
Identifying important elements of cancer control planning that may be missing to the Ministry of Health and providers to effect change
Guiding evaluation of a current cancer control plan
I would use this tool as a guide for cancer control program management
Improving partnership involvement by defining clear areas of intervention by specific stakeholders
Using as a blueprint to plan, implement and evaluate the NCCP

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