

PEER REVIEW HISTORY

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ARTICLE DETAILS

TITLE (PROVISIONAL)	How can the Healthcare System Deliver Sustainable Performance? A Scoping Review
AUTHORS	Zurynski, Yvonne; Herkes, Jessica; Holt, Joanna; McPherson, Elise; Lamprell, Gina; Meulenbroeks, Isabelle; Halim, Nicole; Braithwaite, Jeffrey; Dammary, Genevieve

VERSION 1 – REVIEW

REVIEWER	Kirk, Andrew University of Saskatchewan, Medicine
REVIEW RETURNED	23-Nov-2021

GENERAL COMMENTS	<p>The authors reviewed relevant literature on the subject of sustainable performance of healthcare systems and how this is defined and measured.</p> <p>This is a useful review. Particularly, the table at the end of the paper listing the articles included will be a good jumping off point for future researchers.</p> <p>The subject is an important one as countries around the world struggle to maintain effective healthcare systems. Clarity in the field is particularly important. It's very telling that only 38 of 142 articles discussing SPHS gave any definition of the topic they were discussing and those that did offered mostly financial definitions. I recognize that not everything could be included but I wondered about the rationale for some of the exclusionary criteria. For example, preventative articles such as those referring to vaccination were not included. This strikes me as a very important component of an effective healthcare system and the authors might include a little more on their rationale behind the choice of exclusions.</p> <p>I was hung up in my reading a bit when I read on page 11 that 2750 of 3271 articles were excluded and then seeing on page 12 that 4245 articles were excluded. I had to flip back and forth to try to sort this out. I do see that "some articles were excluded for multiple reasons" and I presume this explains the discrepancy. Is there a way of perhaps making this a little clearer, i.e. what was the overlap on exclusionary reasons? It might be telling to see how these clustered.</p> <p>While the authors do a good job of presenting what's in the literature, I would welcome a paragraph on what's not. In the authors' opinion, what glaring omissions are there in the literature? Overall, this is a useful review.</p>
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REVIEWER	Ho, Lai-Ming The University of Hong Kong, School of Public Health
REVIEW RETURNED	08-Dec-2021

GENERAL COMMENTS

Sustainability of healthcare system is significant. This systematic scoping review aimed to examine different aspects of Sustainable Performance of Healthcare Systems (SPHS), including definitions, measures and indicators, challenges, opportunities for improvement, and sustaining and scaling change. The review process was carefully conducted, appraised, and described, yielding a total of 142 articles for data extraction. Each aspect of SPHS was reported with sufficient details.

Specific comments:

1. Challenges and opportunities for improvements of SPHS were presented, but some may be more important than the others in achieving sustainable performance of healthcare system. The conclusions slightly touched on this point (from line 51 on p26 to line 5 on p27). But the challenges and opportunities for improvements described in the present way, without considering their relative importance, may not be easy for practical use because of scarce resources and competing interests of stakeholders.

2. A generally accepted definition of SPHS does not seem to exist (line 39 on p26). It was suggested in the conclusion that “authors and editors should strive to ensure that a definition is provided in any discussions of SPHS” (line 44 on p26). Different definitions of SPHS will result in different measures, challenges and opportunities, etc in the healthcare system. It will be useful and clearer if there is a matrix showing the relationship between the definition of SPHS and indicators/challenges/improvement/etc.

3. It seems that majority of articles in the present review were based on Western countries. The financing models, healthcare systems, and cultures of these countries might be very different from Asian countries. It would be useful if the generalisability of the present findings can be discussed.

4. This review was based on articles in diverse healthcare settings, and it would be clearer to international readers if the limitations of the present review can be highlighted in the interpretation of the findings, although it was briefly described in line 52 on p5.

5. It would be beneficial if a clear direction for further research could be identified in this review.

VERSION 1 – AUTHOR RESPONSE

Reviewer 1's comments	Author's response	Location in track changed document
<p>The authors reviewed relevant literature on the subject of sustainable performance of healthcare systems and how this is defined and measured. This is a useful review. Particularly, the table at the end of the paper listing the articles included will be a good jumping off point for future researchers. The subject is an important one as countries around the world struggle to maintain effective healthcare systems. Clarity in the field is particularly important. It's very telling that only 38 of 142 articles discussing SPHS gave any definition of the topic they were discussing and those that did offered mostly financial definitions.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments and support of the manuscript. We have added table 4 to the discussion so it is well placed for use in future research.</p>	<p>Pages 23-25</p>
<p>I recognize that not everything could be included but I wondered about the rationale for some of the exclusionary criteria. For example, preventative articles such as those referring to vaccination were not included. This strikes me as a very important component of an effective healthcare system and the authors might include a little more on their rationale behind the choice of exclusions.</p>	<p>This is an important point. Although preventative care is extremely important to sustainable health system performance, it was too large a component to include in this review and warrants its own review (which we have added in the discussion as a potential area for future research). The decision to specifically exclude vaccination articles was twofold: 1) that most vaccination articles were disease-specific and outside the scope of this review, which looked at health system sustainability more broadly; and 2) that we were not focusing on health system sustainability through a public health lens. This would also be an interesting future research area. We have added further justification of these exclusion criteria in the article.</p>	<p>Page 9, lines 9-11</p>

<p>I was hung up in my reading a bit when I read on page 11 that 2750 of 3271 articles were excluded and then seeing on page 12 that 4245 articles were excluded. I had to flip back and forth to try to sort this out. I do see that “some articles were excluded for multiple reasons” and I presume this explains the discrepancy. Is there a way of perhaps making this a little clearer, i.e. what was the overlap on exclusionary reasons? It might be telling to see how these clustered</p>	<p>Thank you for pointing this out, it does appear inconsistent. The exclusion for multiple reasons is indeed the reason for this discrepancy. We have altered table 1 to make this clear by altering the title of the columns and deleting the total column.</p>	<p>Page 12, table 1</p>
<p>While the authors do a good job of presenting what’s in the literature, I would welcome a paragraph on what’s not. In the authors’ opinion, what glaring omissions are there in the literature?</p>	<p>This would add value to the manuscript for future research directions. We have added this element in the discussion section.</p>	<p>Pages 25, lines 3-18, and 26, lines 1-15</p>

Reviewer 2’s comments	Author’s response	Location in updates document
<p>Comments to the Author: Sustainability of healthcare system is significant. This systematic scoping review aimed to examine different aspects of Sustainable Performance of Healthcare Systems (SPHS), including definitions, measures and indicators, challenges, opportunities for improvement, and sustaining and scaling change. The review process was carefully conducted, appraised, and described, yielding a total of 142 articles for data extraction. Each aspect of SPHS was reported with sufficient details.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comment. This is indeed what we tried to achieve in the manuscript.</p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>
<p>Challenges and opportunities for improvements of SPHS were presented, but some may be more important than the others in achieving sustainable performance of healthcare system. The conclusions slightly touched on this point (from line 51 on p26 to line 5 on p27). But the challenges and opportunities for improvements described in the present way, without considering their relative importance, may not</p>	<p>We agree regarding the importance of context and that this could be emphasised more in the article. The new Discussion section addresses this point, including the limited and heterogenous evidence currently available in the literature which precludes making specific practical recommendations.</p>	<p>Page 25-26, Discussion</p>

<p>be easy for practical use because of scarce resources and competing interests of stakeholders.</p>		
<p>A generally accepted definition of SPHS does not seem to exist (line 39 on p26). It was suggested in the conclusion that “authors and editors should strive to ensure that a definition is provided in any discussions of SPHS” (line 44 on p26). Different definitions of SPHS will result in different measures, challenges and opportunities, etc in the healthcare system. It will be useful and clearer if there is a matrix showing the relationship between the definition of SPHS and indicators/challenges/improvement/etc.</p>	<p>This point talks to the need for authors that discuss SPHS to provide a definition that has guided their research or analysis in their particular context – 73% of publications did not do that. We feel that this would be an important first step to improve the interpretation of literature published on SPHS. Although a matrix of the type suggested would provide a very useful guide, there is inadequate evidence in the literature to develop prescriptive matrices as to definitions, measures, indicators and challenges. The new discussion section makes this clear and Table 4 provides a summary of current evidence.</p>	<p>Page 22-25; Table 4; and Page 26 - Conclusions</p>
<p>It seems that majority of articles in the present review were based on Western countries. The financing models, healthcare systems, and cultures of these countries might be very different from Asian countries. It would be useful if the generalisability of the present findings can be discussed.</p>	<p>The boundaries for our review are specified in the methods section and in Table 1 which describes the inclusion and exclusion criteria - our analyses were limited to articles that discussed health systems with relevance to the Australian context.</p> <p>We have acknowledged the limitations that this brings in terms of generalisability and we have suggested that future research needs to address SPHS in other settings, including in low or middle income countries.</p>	<p>Page 5 – Strengths and limitations of this study; Page 9 – Table 1; Page 25-26 – Discussion – Strengths and limitations and Future research directions</p>
<p>This review was based on articles in diverse healthcare settings, and it would be clearer to international readers if the limitations of the present review can be highlighted in the interpretation of the findings, although it was briefly described in line 52 on p5.</p>	<p>Please see our response to the above comment.</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>It would be beneficial if a clear direction for further research could be identified in this review.</p>	<p>We agree that this would be a useful addition, and we have added this to the discussion of the manuscript.</p>	<p>Page 25-26 – Discussion – Future research directions</p>

VERSION 2 – REVIEW

REVIEWER	Kirk, Andrew University of Saskatchewan, Medicine
REVIEW RETURNED	04-Jan-2022

GENERAL COMMENTS	I feel that the authors have addressed reviewers' concerns.
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REVIEWER	Ho, Lai-Ming The University of Hong Kong, School of PUblic Health
REVIEW RETURNED	12-Jan-2022

GENERAL COMMENTS	Thank you for responding and revising the manuscript. The responses are satisfactory. It is understandable that some parts of the analyses cannot be performed due to inadequate evidence. Thank you for addressing the generalizability of the research findings in the limitations, which would be very useful for international readers. I have no other comments. Thank you.
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