

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Navigating the sustainability landscape: a systematic review of sustainability approaches in healthcare

L. Lennox^{1,2*}, L. Maher³ and J. Reed¹

Abstract

Background: Improvement initiatives offer a valuable mechanism for delivering and testing innovations in healthcare settings. Many of these initiatives deliver meaningful and necessary changes to patient care and outcomes. However, many improvement initiatives fail to sustain to a point where their full benefits can be realised. This has led many researchers and healthcare practitioners to develop frameworks, models and tools to support and monitor sustainability. This work aimed to identify what approaches are available to assess and influence sustainability in healthcare and to describe the different perspectives, applications and constructs within these approaches to guide their future use.

Methods: A systematic review was carried out following PRISMA guidelines to identify publications that reported approaches to support or influence sustainability in healthcare. Eligibility criteria were defined through an iterative process in which two reviewers independently assessed 20% of articles to test the objectivity of the selection criteria. Data were extracted from the identified articles, and a template analysis was undertaken to identify and assess the sustainability constructs within each reported approach.

Results: The search strategy identified 1748 publications with 227 articles retrieved in full text for full documentary analysis. In total, 62 publications identifying a sustainability approach were included in this review (32 frameworks, 16 models, 8 tools, 4 strategies, 1 checklist and 1 process). Constructs across approaches were compared and 40 individual constructs for sustainability were found. Comparison across approaches demonstrated consistent constructs were seen regardless of proposed interventions, setting or level of application with 6 constructs included in 75% of the approaches. Although similarities were found, no approaches contained the same combination of the constructs nor did any single approach capture all identified constructs. From these results, a consolidated framework for sustainability constructs in healthcare was developed.

Conclusions: Choosing a sustainability method can pose a challenge because of the diverse approaches reported in the literature. This review provides a valuable resource to researchers, healthcare professionals and improvement practitioners by providing a summary of available sustainability approaches and their characteristics.

Trial registration: This review was registered on the PROSPERO database: CRD42016040081 in June 2016.

Keywords: Sustainability, Method, Tool, Model, Framework, Assessment, Quality improvement

* Correspondence: l.lennox@imperial.ac.uk

¹NIHR CLAHRC North West London, 369 Fulham Road, London SW10 9NH, United Kingdom

²Department of Primary Care and Public Health, Imperial College London, 369 Fulham Road, London, United Kingdom

Full list of author information is available at the end of the article

