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The added value of costing social and behavior change interventions

Breakthrough RESEARCH

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The Added Value of Costing Social & Behavior Change Interventions

This brief provides an overview of how investment in high-quality costing of social and behavior change (SBC) interventions can benefit the work of government ministries, donors, program implementers, and technical specialists. It also introduces the Breakthrough RESEARCH “Guidelines for Costing of Social and Behavior Change Health Interventions” that can be utilized to plan for and optimize such investment. With the support of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Breakthrough RESEARCH is developing a body of SBC cost-related evidence and tools that emphasize the value of investing in high-quality SBC programming and research and evaluation.

What Is Costing?

Costing is the process of collecting data from various sources and analyzing it to estimate the cost of a health program or intervention. Potential sources of cost information depend on the purpose of the costing and the quality of the available sources. They may include budgets, program payroll and purchasing records, interviews, or market prices. High-quality cost data are critical for the purposes of:

- Budgeting and price setting.
- Medium- and long-term planning.
- Economic evaluation.¹
- Priority setting.
- Technical efficiency analyses.²
- Advocacy.

What Are the Benefits of Costing SBC Programs?

A high-quality SBC costing study, designed and implemented according to the “Guidelines for Costing of Social and Behavior Change Health Interventions,” can support planning and budgeting, save money by setting prices appropriately, make SBC programs more efficient, and improve SBC advocacy. Just as investment in better epidemiological data is imperative to planning and targeting health services, investment in SBC costing can reap dividends through improving the use of limited resources and optimizing SBC interventions to change health behaviors and increase uptake of health services.

How Can Costing SBC Programs Inform and Strengthen my Work?

Investment in SBC program costing can inform and strengthen the work of a variety of audiences, from government ministries and donors to program implementers and technical specialists. For example:

Government ministries could:

- Develop annual **budget** estimates for SBC activities to help ensure the activities receive adequate funding in next year’s budget. Ministry program

managers may need to commission a special costing study to understand the additional cost of new SBC interventions in their portfolio.

- Demonstrate with an **economic evaluation** that the benefits of investing in SBC interventions in health and/or other sectors will bring longer-term savings to the government’s budget, and that **advocacy** may be persuasive at convincing the Ministry of Finance to allocate greater resources to SBC programming.

Donors could:

- Engage in a **medium-term strategic planning** process where the evaluation of proposals for a five-year grant indicates significant variability in costs allocated to SBC. To improve future reviews and benchmark what are reasonable costs, the donor may commission a costing study with standardized methodology across multiple countries.

Public, private, or nongovernmental program implementers could:

- Determine a fair **price** to outsource the design and management of a national mass media SBC campaign to a subcontractor if the implementer lacks the internal capacity for such a campaign. Commissioning a cost study could prevent over- or under-paying for services and encourage value for money.
- Develop an investment case for SBC activities as an **advocacy** tool for donors. An especially effective approach would be predicated on high-quality cost and impact data, and would leverage evidence of cost and effectiveness to make a case for the health area/s of interest to them. If the quality, quantity, and relevance of available SBC cost data are insufficient, cost-data collection may be commissioned to fill in gaps.

Technical specialists could:

- Help the government evaluate an SBC innovation with potential impacts across a range of health areas. If data for both cost and effectiveness are lacking, a **technical efficiency analysis** could be conducted to help the government determine whether it is worthwhile to pursue the new approach and how best to implement the innovation at scale.

1 Economic evaluation can include cost effectiveness or cost-benefit analysis.

2 Technical efficiency analyses are used to determine how to produce the maximum output, however defined, for a given set of inputs.

How Can I Learn More About the Costing of SBC Programs?

Breakthrough RESEARCH's "Guidelines for Costing of Social and Behavior Change Health Interventions" offer standardized and detailed information on the approaches for high-quality and applicable costing of SBC programs.

The guidelines contain:

- **Seventeen principles and associated methods for conducting a costing study.** For instance, Principle 1 ("Purpose") will help determine the extent to which the application of costing is considered fit for the purpose in which it will be used and its adherence to global costing standards.³
- **Details on how to adapt standardized costing methodology to the unique challenges that are specific to the costing of SBC interventions.** The details provide explicit precautions, such as the need to pay more attention to the design process than may be necessary in other types of interventions; the need to clearly describe the components of the program, which are often delivered as a package; and the importance of identifying and measuring SBC-specific inputs when they are part of a broader health or cross-sectoral intervention.
- **An appendix on reporting standards** that succinctly illustrates the standards for reporting on the cost application, methodology, and data produced. The reporting standards are necessary to enable proper interpretation of the cost estimate/s obtained.

For more information on Breakthrough RESEARCH products related to SBC costing, please see:

"Making the Business Case for Social and Behavior Change Programming" (brief), at <http://breakthroughactionandresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/BR-Activity-Brief-Costing-FINAL.pdf>,

"Social and Behavior Change Business Case and Costing" (webinar), at <https://breakthroughactionandresearch.org/making-the-business-case-for-social-and-behavior-change-programming/>,

"Guidelines for Costing of Social and Behavior Change Health Interventions" at <https://breakthroughactionandresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Guidelines-for-SBC-Costing.pdf>.

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3 Anna Vassall et al. 2017. "Reference Case for Estimating the Costs of Global Health Services and Interventions," Global Health Cost Consortium, https://ghcosting.org/pages/standards/reference_case.