Title: New insights from EuroDISH mapping of food and health research infrastructure

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Abstract

Introduction

Recent initiatives have encouraged the formalisation of research infrastructure in Europe. This is designed to unify fragmented facilities, resources and services and facilitate world-class research of complex public health challenges, such as those related to non-communicable disease.

Objective

The EuroDISH project aimed to design a protocol to map the status quo of food and health research.

Method/Design

Research infrastructure was mapped in four areas of food and health research, represented by a DISH model: Determinants of dietary behaviour (D); Intake of foods and nutrients (I); Status and functional markers of nutritional health (S); Health and disease risk of foods and nutrients (H). A common protocol was used throughout to co-ordinate data collection and recording of results for four teams of researchers. The definition of research infrastructure was based upon previous work by ESFRI (European Strategy Forum Research Infrastructures) and MERIL (Mapping European Research Infrastructure Landscape). The study design consisted of desk research, qualitative semi-structured interviews (n=30) and a stakeholder workshop (n=49). Identified research infrastructure was classified using MERIL criteria and thematic qualitative analysis.

Results

Infrastructure in the food and health research area is fragmented and disparate. Difficulties were seen identifying research infrastructure and classifying stages of research infrastructure development. Particular problems were found identifying the degree a project, a network or a national infrastructure could be considered a research infrastructure and establishing the boundary of a research infrastructure (integral hard/soft facilities, resources or services).

Conclusion

A considered approach is required to survey research infrastructure and interpret potential gaps or needs. Transparent, up-to-date information on available research resources, facilities and services is required to keep pace with infrastructure changes and research needs.


Key words: Nutrition; health determinants; dietary intake; nutritional status; public health