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# Translating Population Health Research into Policy and Practice

*The Role of Academic Incentives*

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Every system is perfectly  
designed to achieve the  
results it gets.



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# Population Health Research

- Peer reviewed publications
- Research grants
- Conference presentations
- Teaching



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If you think changing history  
is hard, try changing a  
history department!



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# New Paradigm Emerging?

- Interdisciplinary
- Problem identification includes non-academic partners
- Including a focus on knowledge transfer

*Phaneuf, 2007*

# The Role of Academic Incentives in Applied Health Services Research and Knowledge Transfer

*Patricia Pittman, Ph.D., AcademyHealth; Margaret Trinity, M.M., Independent Consultant;  
Jennifer Tsai, M.P.H., AcademyHealth*

October 2010



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# Pressures on the Academy

- Recognition of the need to focus on population health
- Demands on AMCs to serve the public good
- Federal initiatives (e.g. CTSAs)
- ACA related pressures

# Growing Interest in Research Impact Assessment

- Given limited funding available for research, science agencies and funders around the world are emphasizing research that has clear societal benefits and documented impact outside academia<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Holbrook, J.B. & Frodeman, R. (2011). Peer review and the *ex-ante* assessment of societal impacts. *Research Evaluation*, 20(3): 239-246.



# How do you evaluate research impact?

- Traditional tools to evaluate impact:<sup>1</sup>
  - Bibliometrics
  - Case studies
  - Economic cost-benefit analysis
  - Peer review
- The Payback Framework<sup>2</sup>
  - Commonly used, multi-dimensional model for “paybacks” from research, including:
    - 1) Knowledge; 2) Benefits to future research and research use; 3) Benefits from informing policy and policy development; 4) Health and health sector benefits; and 5) Broader economic benefits

<sup>1</sup>Jones, M. & Grant, J. (2013). Making the Grade: Methodologies for assessing and evidencing research impact. *7 Essays on Impact*. (Ed. Dean et al.): 25-43.

<sup>2</sup>Donovan, C. & Hanney, S. (2011). The ‘Payback Framework’ explained. *Research Evaluation*, 20(3): 181-183.



# Funders are taking note...

- The Research Excellence Framework (REF): new peer assessment system for evaluating the quality of research in UK higher education institutions that informs selective allocation of research funding<sup>1</sup>
- National Science Foundation Merit Review Criteria<sup>2</sup>
  - Intellectual Merit (e.g. importance, innovation, etc.)
  - Broader impacts (e.g. societal impacts)
- Among others

<sup>1</sup>Research Excellence Framework (2014): <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>

<sup>2</sup>Holbrook, J.B. & Frodeman, R. (2011).

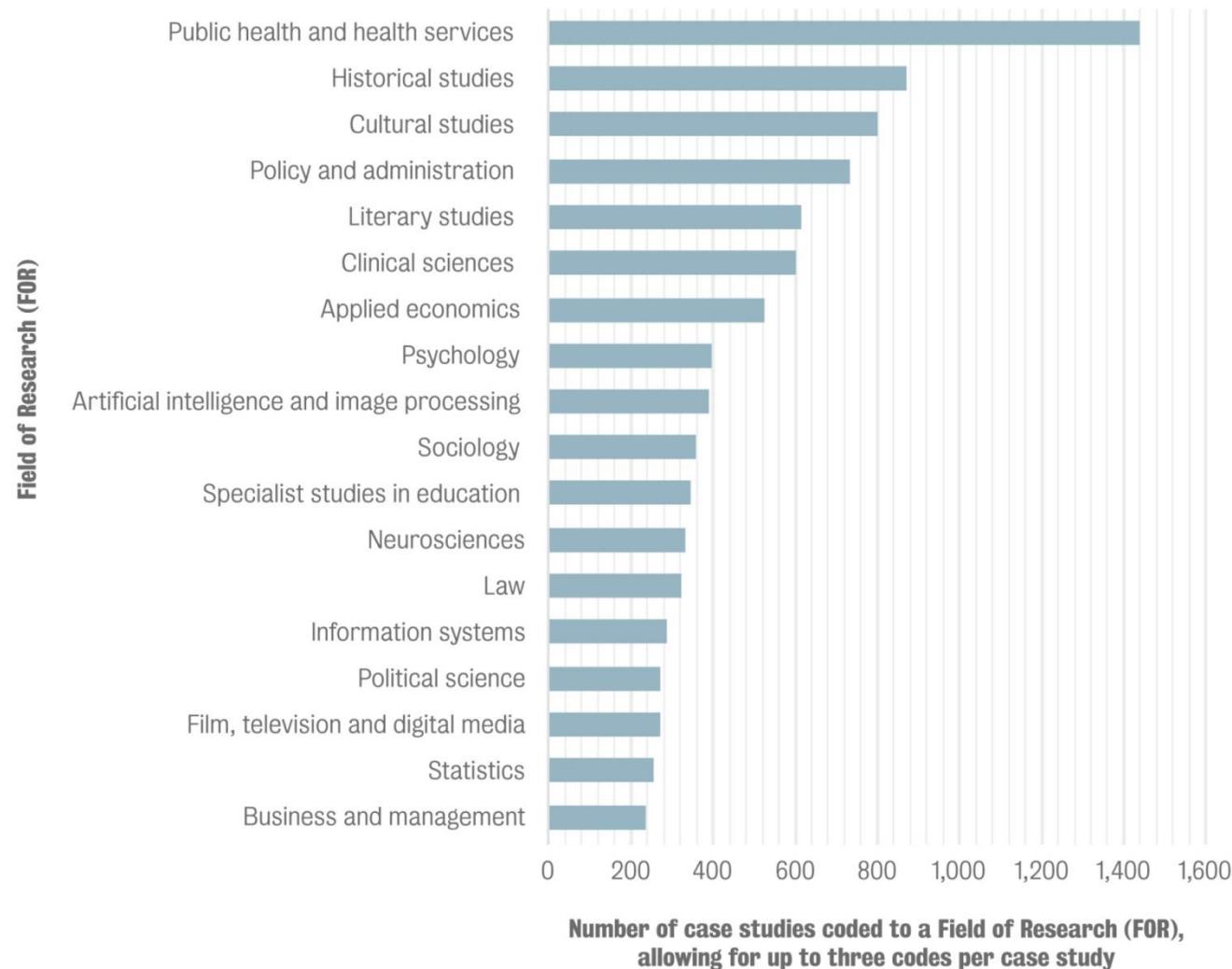


# UK Research Excellence Framework

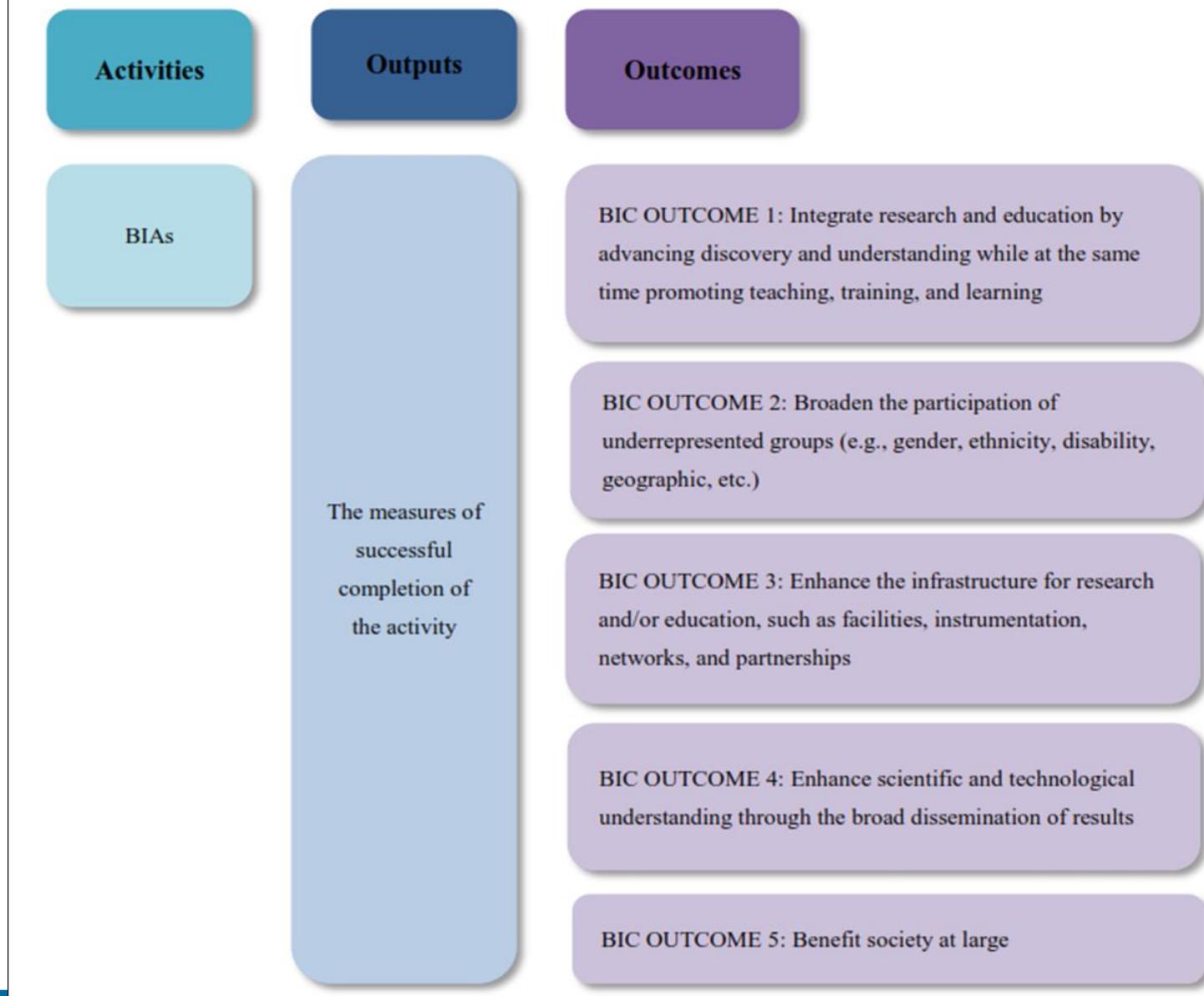
- Impact is defined as 'any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'
- Outcomes used in 3 ways:
  - Funding allocation
  - Accountability for public investment
  - Benchmarking & establishing reputational yardsticks
- Allocation formula
  - The quality of research **outputs**. (65% of assessment)
  - The **impact** of research beyond academia. (20% of assessment)
  - The research **environment**. (15% of assessment)



# UK REF Analysis Impact Case Studies



**Figure 1. BIC program logic model 1**



# So what's the hold up?

- The UK, Australia, and Canada have made significant strides in evaluating research impact and aligning funding allocation
- But... the US lags: Why?



# Challenges

- No metric is perfect; effective assessment involves both quantitative and qualitative strategies
  - This can be labor-intensive and cost-prohibitive
- The pathway from research to impact is neither linear nor quick
- Attribution is challenging when a research study contributes to a body of evidence
- Knowledge transfer activities are still not rewarded in traditional academic incentives in the U.S.



# Application to Population Health Research

- Challenges in demonstrating impact may be particularly pronounced for population health research
  - Given time lag to realize population health outcomes and challenges with attribution
- Funders are increasingly rewarding research that can demonstrate impact beyond academia
- Opportunity for population health researchers to consider the impact of their work in new ways... ways that will resonate with funders and the public

