COVID-END: Achievements, Priorities and Opportunities to Draw on this Work to Achieve Greater Value for Money When Commissioning or Funding COVID-19 Research

EViR (Ensuring Value in Research) Webinar, 30 July 2020

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Background

- COVID-END is a time-limited network that has come together in response to an ‘exogenous shock’ (COVID-19) to collaboratively advance the evidence (synthesis) ecosystem in a way that
  - Makes the most of an explosion of interest in and demand for evidence synthesis (in part by reducing the noise-to-signal ratio)
  - Makes the evidence (synthesis) ecosystem even more robust and resilient in future
  - Strengthens existing institutions and processes
- COVID-END’s work can also help to make the most of investments in primary research
Some of COVID-END’s 45+ Partners
Three of the seven principles that underpin COVID-END’s work

- Supporting (not competing with or replacing) well-positioned organizations that are working in close partnership with key target audiences and already responding to their evidence needs
- Supporting – with a common brand/identity, small agile secretariat, and simple working group structure – a distributed network of organizations and individuals to play to their comparative advantages and leverage one another’s work
- Seeking out quick wins for those supporting decision-makers and among those involved in preparing evidence syntheses, technology assessments and guidelines, and taking measured steps to longer-term solutions that can better support decision-makers
Achievements (https://www.covid-end.org)

1) Regularly updated guide to key COVID-19 evidences sources, which can be used to quickly review high-yield, high-quality sources of evidence to respond to decision-makers’ urgent questions

2) Repository of COVID-19 knowledge hubs, which can be used to identify organizations that are already supporting decision-making with a specific topic or sectoral focus, with a specific type of resource (e.g., recommendations, evidence syntheses or data), and/or with a specific geographic or linguistic scope

3) Taxonomy of decisions where evidence will be needed, which spans public-health measures, clinical management of COVID-19 and pandemic-related health issues, health-system arrangements, and economic & social responses

4) Principles and resources to support evidence packaging for decision-makers

5) Description of an evidence-support model that can provide responses to decision-makers questions – both what’s known and who’s doing what – in timelines as short as three hours

6) Tips and tools for those supporting decision-makers

7) Resources to support researchers considering or conducting an evidence synthesis (with an interactive flow diagram)
Seven Working Groups Focused on Quick Wins and Processes for Longer-Term Solutions

1) **Scoping** where support and coordination is most needed and what principles should underpin such support and coordination

2) **Engaging** those already supporting decision-makers to work in more coordinated and efficient ways

3) **Digitizing** as many aspects of the work as possible to facilitate coordination and capture efficiencies

4) **Synthesizing** the evidence that already exists in ways that are more coordinated and efficient and that balance quality and timeliness

5) **Recommend**ing evidence-based approaches in ways that are more coordinated and efficient and that balance quality and timeliness

6) **Packaging** evidence and guidelines in ways that meet the needs of citizens, providers, policymakers and researchers in different contexts and languages

7) **Sustaining** the efforts that strengthen institutions and processes so that we are even better prepared for future challenges
Priorities: 1) COVID-END Community Listserv

- Reached out to 20+ networks to identify individuals with the following attributes to invite them to join the listserv (and community of practice)
  - Creating and/or using evidence syntheses, technology assessments, and/or guidelines as the focus of their support to decision-making about COVID-19
  - Engaging with decision-making about COVID-19 by citizens/service users, providers, and/or health- and social-system policymakers
  - Keen to learn from others about how to support decision-making about COVID-19 and willing to explore challenges and/or share experiences through online discussions
  - Share the values of the COVID-END partnership
- Created a preliminary list of discussion topics and facilitators
- Developed an approach to summarizing and sharing the insights from both organized topic discussions and ad hoc interactions
- Join the COVID-END Community listserv
Priorities: 2) Inventory (and Sharing)

- Inventory of ‘best evidence syntheses’ for all types of decisions being faced by those who are part of the COVID-19 pandemic response, which will save time and avoid duplication for those providing ‘front-line’ decision support in government (who can then focus on what the evidence means for their context)
  - Evidence syntheses harvested bi-weekly from sources in COVID-END guide
  - Filters applied for all parts of the COVID-END taxonomy of decisions (COVID-focused for all parts and often COVID-relevant too for health-system arrangements and economic & social responses)
  - ‘Best evidence syntheses’ rank-ordered within any given ‘row’ in taxonomy, based on
    - Date of search (e.g., 2020-07-01)
    - Quality (AMSTAR) rating (e.g., 8/11)
    - Evidence profile available (e.g., yes, with hyperlink)
  - Re-worded title with details to support relevance assessment (e.g., participants/exposure/outcomes)
  - Additional decision-relevant information profiled
    - Living evidence document (e.g., yes)
    - Type of synthesis (e.g., full review, rapid review, protocol)
    - Type of question (e.g., benefits & harms, costs, views and experiences, how & why it works)
- COVID-END’s ‘improve my RIS file service’ will enable value-added data sharing across different group’s workflows (e.g., Cochrane, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, UNCOVER)
Rough Example of What the Inventory Will Look Like (Hiding and Not Hiding Columns)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad and specific decisions</th>
<th>Criteria for 'best evidence synthesis'</th>
<th>Key details to support relevance assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of last search</td>
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<td>Evidence profile</td>
</tr>
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<td>Title</td>
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| Infection prevention         |                                        |                                            |

| Personal protection          |                                        |                                            |
|------------------------------|                                        |                                            |
| Washing hands                |                                        |                                            |

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Priorities: 3) Horizon Scanning

- Global horizon-scanning panel, comprised of diverse strategic and ‘out-of-the-box’ thinkers and doers, to proactively identify both long-term and emergent issues that need to be prioritized in efforts to synthesize the best available research evidence to support decision-making about COVID-19
  - Diverse in their coverage across the parts of the taxonomy and the four key target audiences (citizens, providers, policymakers and researchers)
  - Diversity in terms of WHO region and primary language
- Main focus is to identify priorities for living reviews on recurring priorities (and full or rapid reviews on one-off priorities) as we transition from a sprint to a marathon
Drawing on This Work When Commissioning or Funding Evidence Syntheses

- Point ‘new entrants’ to
  - Resources to support researchers (interactive flow diagram) to ensure they’re being as systematic and transparent as possible
    - E.g., register their protocol with PROPERO
    - E.g., work with established like Cochrane and Campbell

- Point everyone to
  - Inventory of ‘best evidence syntheses’ to ensure they’re filling a gap
  - Horizon-scanning reports to ensure they’re addressing a need
  - Intermediary groups who can help with points on the next slide

- Be explicit about the rare instances when commissioning or funding replications of existing syntheses
Drawing on This Work When Commissioning or Funding Evidence-Contextualization Initiatives

- Point ‘new entrants’ to
  - Tips and tools for those supporting decision-makers
  - Principles and resources to support evidence packaging for decision-makers

- Point everyone to
  - Repository of COVID-19 knowledge hubs to ensure they’re filling a gap in topic or sectoral focus, type of resource (e.g., recommendations, evidence syntheses or data), and/or geographic or linguistic scope
  - Guide and soon the inventory of ‘best evidence syntheses’ to ensure they’re supporting the use of best evidence
  - Description of an evidence-support model if they need to provide responses to decision-makers questions in timelines as short as three hours
Drawing on This Work When Commissioning or Funding Primary Research

- Point everyone to
  - Inventory of ‘best evidence syntheses’ to ensure they’re filling a gap in the primary studies included in these syntheses (e.g., no or low-certainty evidence and no identified study protocols
  - Horizon-scanning reports to ensure they’re addressing a need
  - Other resources beyond COVID-END
    - COVID-19-COS for core outcomes
Keep Up To Date and/or Share Your Insights

1) Website – https://www.covid-end.org
2) Email – c/o covid-end@mcmaster.ca
3) Twitter – @covid_e_n_d
4) COVID-END Community listserv – https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?SUBED1=COVIDEND&A=1