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Introduction

COVID-19 has created a **once-in-a-generation focus** on evidence among governments, businesses and non-governmental organizations, many types of professionals, and citizens. There has been an unparalleled demand for evidence to address rapidly evolving challenges, as well as remarkable efforts to meet this demand with the best evidence under very tight timelines. Not all went well, of course. Some decision-makers wilfully ignored best evidence, while others trafficked in mis- and dis-information. Many things other than best evidence were relied upon, and some forms of evidence were relied upon more than others. There was uneven topic coverage, variable quality and updating failures among the syntheses of the best evidence globally, as well as tremendous research waste arising from a lack of coordination. But many parts of the COVID-19 evidence response did go well, such as rapid multi-country randomized-controlled trials, living evidence products, and rapid contextualized evidence support for government policymakers.

Other societal challenges – from educational achievement to health-system performance to climate change – need a similarly renewed focus on best evidence. The pandemic more clearly revealed some deeply rooted challenges, such as inequalities in exposure to risks and in access to ways to mitigate those risks. Other ‘slow-burn’ challenges were temporarily put aside, and now need to be returned to. Plus we have learned about the need to better prepare for unpredictable future crises, including but certainly not limited to future health emergencies.

Now is the time to systematize the aspects of using evidence that are going well and address the many shortfalls, which means creating the capacities, opportunities and motivation to use evidence to address societal challenges, and putting in place the structures and processes to sustain them. Now is also the time to balance the use of evidence with judgement, humility and empathy. For those seeking to use evidence to address societal challenges, legitimacy needs to be earned and then actively maintained. The Global Commission on Evidence to Address Societal Challenges was convened to support people in this vital work.

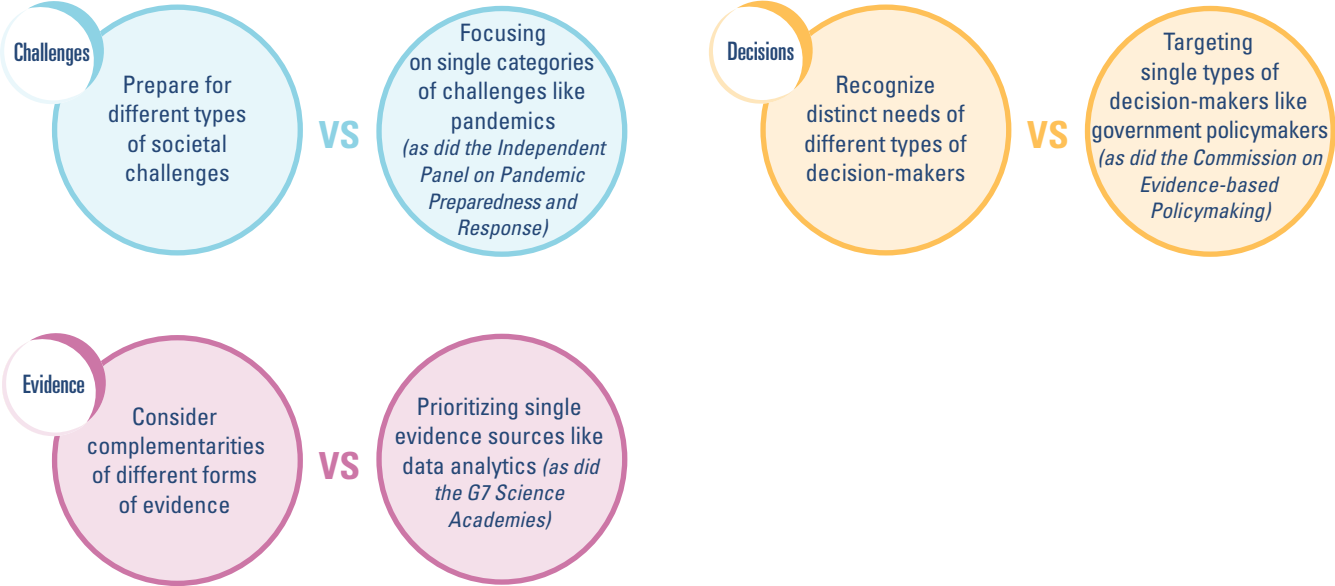
We use the word ‘evidence’ in this report to mean **research evidence**. Researchers do research. Decision-makers may use the resulting evidence. Ideally they will use the forms of evidence that are the best match to the specific questions that need to be answered, and do so recognizing that there is typically not a straight line between evidence and action in most circumstances (e.g., the evidence may address some but not all questions, it may be of low quality or of limited applicability to their context, and there may be significant uncertainty). They may also use other types of evidence, such as experiential evidence derived from their own lived experiences and the judicial evidence considered in a court of law. Decision-makers may also consider many other factors in making a decision. Government policymakers, for example, need to give attention to institutional constraints (including resource constraints), interest-group pressure, their own personal values, and the values of their constituents, among other factors. Our focus is supporting four types of decision-makers – government policymakers, organizational leaders, professionals and citizens – to better use evidence, research evidence specifically, alongside other factors in addressing societal challenges.

The first six parts of this executive summary provide some of the context, concepts, and shared vocabulary that underpin the Evidence Commission’s recommendations. **Equity** is a thread that runs through the entire report. These six parts can be used by many people, not just those positioned to make the changes necessary to ensure that evidence is consistently used to address societal challenges. The seventh part provides an overview of the Evidence Commission’s recommendations about how we can and must improve the use of evidence, both in routine times and in future global crises.

The Evidence Commission’s **25 commissioners** were carefully selected to bring diverse points of view to their deliberations. They have experience with most types of societal challenges (and Sustainable Development Goals), as all types of decision-makers (government policymakers, organizational leaders, professionals and citizens), and with all major forms of evidence. They bring a spectrum of experience and seniority and come from all corners of the globe.



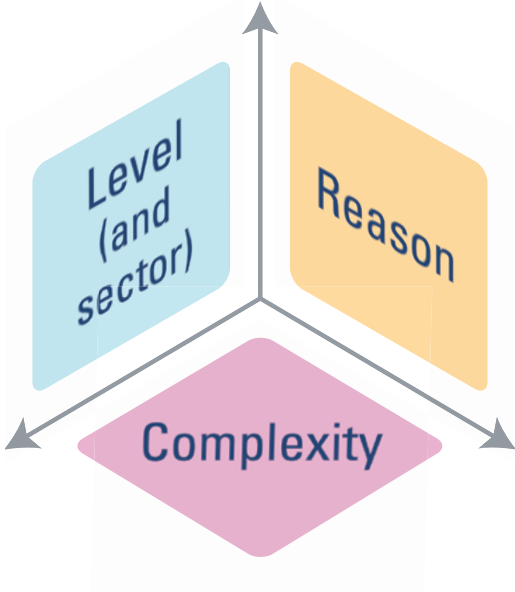
The Evidence Commission has **built on and complements past work** in the following ways:



The Evidence Commission report includes **52 sections** that can be separately downloaded from the Evidence Commission website. Drafts of these sections were shared publicly at key junctures in the work of the Evidence Commission, both to elicit feedback about how to strengthen them and to begin building momentum for action. These sections often include one or more infographics. They have been designed to be easily used in presentations, reports, and other formats. The Evidence Commission encourages you to ‘share freely, give credit, adapt with permission.’

Nature of societal challenges

A **challenge** can be looked at by the level at which it is typically addressed, by the reason to label it a problem worth paying attention to, or by the complexity of the underlying problem. We give examples of societal challenges below, focusing on the level (and sector) at which it is typically addressed and the complexity of the underlying problem.



| | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Level (and sector) at which a challenge is typically addressed | Domestic sectoral | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health systems failing to improve health outcomes and care experiences • Schools struggling with virtual instruction • Declining living standards |
| | Domestic cross-sectoral | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antimicrobial resistance • Gender-based violence • Growing levels of inequality • Lack of trust in institutions • Missed targets for the Sustainable Development Goals |
| | Global (or regional) coordination | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequitable patterns in COVID-19 vaccination • Climate change |

| | | |
|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Complexity of the underlying problem | Simple | Cause and effect can be easily identified and the solution can involve a single action |
| | Complicated | Causes can be identified and the solution can involve rules and processes |
| | Complex | Some causes can be identified, others are hidden, and some may be consequences of other causes, and the solution is multifaceted and may need to be adjusted as it is implemented |
| | 'Complexity cubed' (or wicked) | Causes are even more complex because symptoms can become causes and because feedback loops operate, so solutions are highly context specific, and wrong or mistimed solutions can make the problem worse |

Additional dimensions of a challenge can include the time horizon (e.g., effects of health and social services on experiences and outcomes can often be evaluated over weeks and months, whereas the effects of climate action are modeled over decades and centuries) and stakeholder complexity (e.g., some challenges can be discussed with a well-organized peak association of stakeholders, while others require engaging with a large number of differently sized and resourced groups, including civil-society groups). A challenge can also be expressed negatively (as a problem) or positively (as a goal or strength to be built upon). The Sustainable Development Goals and the strengths-based approaches often advocated by Indigenous peoples are examples of the latter.

Decisions and decision-makers: Demand for evidence

People can decide whether and how to take action on impulse (often as part of a habit-driven, non-conscious process) or after reflection (as part of a deliberative, conscious process that can include finding and using evidence). For the latter, approaching **decision-making as a series of steps** can help to make explicit the questions that may be asked and the nature of the decisions, even if many people don't follow steps at all or don't follow them in order. Here we introduce two types of decision-makers (government policymakers and citizens, including in this case those acting as community leaders).

| Steps | Decisions for a government policymaker | Decisions for a citizen or community leader |
|--|---|---|
| Understanding a problem and its causes | Should we pay attention to this problem given all the others we face as a government? | Should I pay attention to this problem given all the others that the people and community I care about face? |
| Selecting an option for addressing the problem | Should we take any action to address this problem and, if yes, which option should we select? | Should I take any action to address this problem and, if yes, what action (e.g., talk to others about changing their behaviour, work with fellow community members on local solutions, or contact elected officials)? |
| Identifying implementation considerations | Should we take any additional steps to increase the chance that the selected option does what we intend it to do? | Should I work with fellow community members and encourage elected officials to take steps to ensure the selected option reaches the people and community I care about? |
| Monitoring implementation and evaluating impacts | Should we take any additional steps to give us the numbers we need to tell a success story or to correct our course if need be? | [As above]... to ensure we have the numbers we need to know whether we're succeeding or failing? |

The Evidence Commission focuses on **four types of decision-makers** – the two noted above as well as organizational leaders and professionals. Each type of decision-maker may approach decisions in different ways. Here we provide an example of an approach used by each type, recognizing that this approach may be complemented by others (e.g., government policymakers also play a role in supporting decision-making by others, including by funding or 'building' the evidence used by them).



Government policymakers

Need to be convinced there's a compelling problem, a viable policy and conducive politics



Professionals

(e.g., doctors, engineers, police officers, social workers and teachers)

Need the opportunity, motivation and capability to make a professional decision or to work with individual clients to make shared decisions



Organizational leaders

(e.g., business and non-governmental organization leaders)

Need a business case to offer goods and services



Citizens

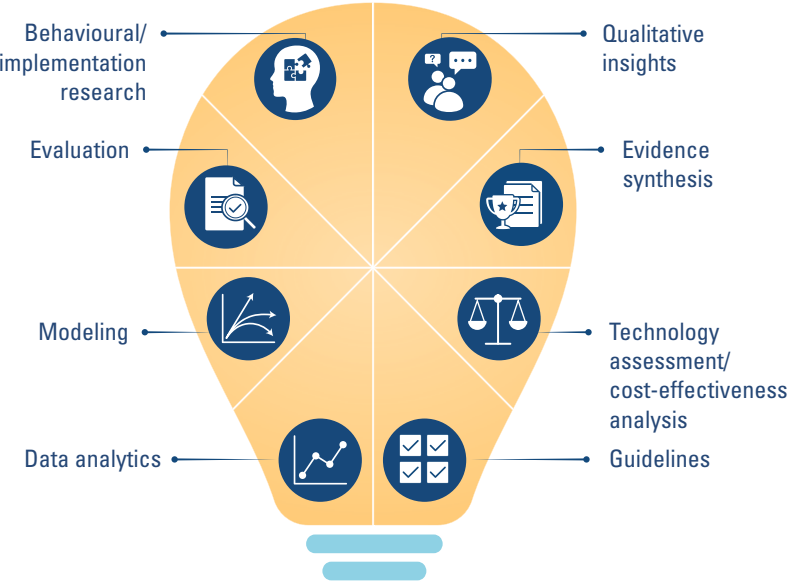
(e.g., patients, service users, voters and community leaders)

Need the opportunity, motivation and capability to make a personal decision, take local action or build a social movement

People wear multiple 'hats' and may have experience in multiple roles. For example, a government policymaker is also a citizen, may have trained in the past as a doctor or teacher, and may have led a non-governmental organization before being elected or appointed to government.

Studies, syntheses and guidelines: Supply of evidence

Evidence is typically encountered in decision-making in the **eight different forms** depicted in the 'light bulb' infographic. These forms can be interrelated. For example, an evaluation featuring a randomized-controlled trial may also incorporate evidence that draws on data analytics, qualitative insights, and a cost-effectiveness analysis. Similarly, a case study may draw on both qualitative insights about experiences and preferences and quantitative evidence from data analytics, modeling and evaluations.














Each step in a decision-making process can be mapped to particularly helpful forms of evidence. Evidence syntheses can help answer almost all of these questions by summarizing what we know and don't know based on all of the studies that have addressed a similar question. Evidence syntheses are critically important for questions about benefits and harms, both for options and for implementation strategies.

| Steps | Related questions | Examples of helpful forms of evidence |
|--|---|---|
| Understanding a problem and its causes | Indicators – How big is the problem? | Data analytics |
| | Comparisons – Is the problem getting worse or is it bigger here than elsewhere? | Data analytics (e.g., using administrative databases or community surveys) |
| | Framing – How do different people describe or experience the problem and its causes? | Qualitative studies (e.g., using interviews and focus groups) |
| Selecting an option for addressing the problem | Benefits – What good might come of it? | Evaluations (e.g., effectiveness studies like randomized-controlled trials) |
| | Harms – What could go wrong? | Evaluations (e.g., observational studies) |
| | Cost-effectiveness – Does one option achieve more for the same investment? | Technology assessments / cost-effectiveness evaluations |
| | Adaptations – Can we adapt something that worked elsewhere while still getting the benefits? | Evaluations (e.g., process evaluations that examine how and why an option worked) |
| | Stakeholders' views and experiences – Which groups support which option? | Qualitative studies (e.g., using interviews and focus groups to understand what is important to citizens) |
| Identifying implementation considerations | Barriers and facilitators – What (and who) will get in the way or help us in reaching and achieving desired impacts among the right people? | Qualitative studies (e.g., using interviews and focus groups to understand barriers and facilitators) |
| | Benefits, harms, cost-effectiveness, etc. of implementation strategies – What strategies should we use to reach and achieve desired impacts among the right people? | Behavioural / implementation research See also 'selecting an option' |
| Monitoring implementation and evaluating impacts | Is the chosen option reaching those who can benefit from it? | Data analytics |
| | Is the chosen option achieving desired impacts at sufficient scale? | Evaluations |

Decision-makers need both **local evidence** (i.e., what has been learned in their own country, state/province or city) **and global evidence** (i.e., what has been learned around the world, including how it varies by groups and contexts). By ‘local’ we mean national and sub-national, and that evidence can take many forms, including local data analytics, a local evaluation, and local implementation research. The global evidence typically takes the form of an evidence synthesis, which we return to below.

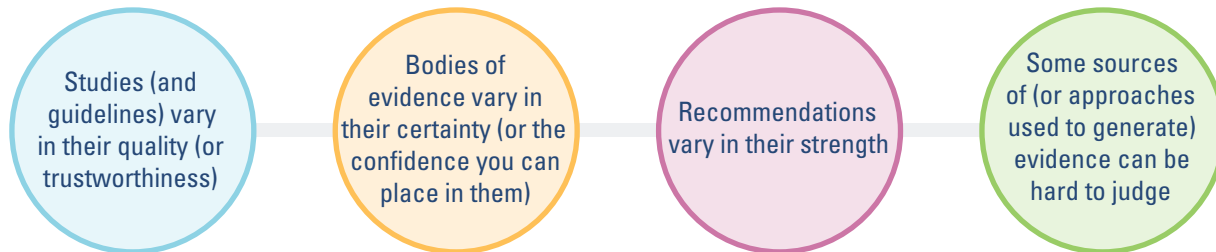
Decision-makers may benefit from recommendations that draw on both local and global evidence. Guidelines, by definition, provide recommendations. In times of crisis we must often initially rely on emerging guidance (e.g., we don’t yet know enough but wash your hands well in the meantime) and then on replacement guidance (e.g., we now have evidence indicating that masks reduce transmission). At all times, we need to be open to what have been called ‘reversals,’ which is when accumulating evidence shows that approaches thought to have benefits turn out to not actually work, or even cause harm. Technology assessments may provide recommendations, or they may provide a type of evidence support by complementing the available evidence with an assessment of the social, ethical and legal factors that may also influence a local decision.

Modeling is most commonly a form of local evidence. However, it can provide a way of synthesizing the best evidence globally, as is done in high-stakes domains like climate action, medicines reimbursement, and macroeconomic policy. Modeling can also provide a form of local evidence support, with modelers effectively acting as a type of evidence intermediary. This was the case with many jurisdiction-specific COVID-19 models that government policymakers drew on to predict the likely future impacts (and most consequential uncertainties) of options like lockdowns. When done well, this modeling used effect estimates from evidence syntheses or, in their absence, systematically elicited expert opinion.

| Vantage point | Forms of evidence | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--|--|
| <p>Local (national or sub-national) evidence</p>  |  Data analytics |  Modeling |  Evaluation |  Behavioural/ implementation research |  Qualitative insights |
| <p>Global evidence</p>  |  Evidence synthesis An evidence synthesis uses a systematic and transparent process to identify, select, appraise and synthesize the findings from all studies that have addressed the same question. The objective is to come to an overall understanding of what is known, including how this may vary by groups (e.g., girls and young women) and contexts (e.g., low- and middle-income countries). For questions about options, part of what is known can be about what works for whom in what contexts. | | | | |
| <p>Local (national or sub-national) recommendations or evidence support informed by local and global evidence</p>  |  Technology assessments |  Guidelines | | | |

Local and global evidence may be informed or complemented by **other forms of analysis**, such as policy, systems and political analysis. Policy analysis can help to clarify a policy problem and its causes, to frame options to address the problem, and to identify implementation considerations. Systems analysis can help to understand who gets to make what types of decisions about the challenge now (governance arrangements), how money flows in addressing the challenge now (financial arrangements), and how efforts to address the challenge now (e.g., programs, services and products) reach and benefit those who need them (delivery arrangements); and to understand which of these system arrangements may need to change in future. Political analysis helps to identify whether there is a compelling problem, a viable policy and conducive politics (i.e., a window of opportunity) to take action now; and to identify what it would take to open a window of opportunity if now is not the moment.

Not all evidence is high **quality** and reliable for making decisions. Tools exist for many (but not all) forms of evidence to help make judgements about whether the evidence (from a single study or a body of evidence) can be relied upon. These tools use scores or grades to help users understand how confident they can be in the evidence. Many journals now require authors to follow reporting standards, such as CONSORT for randomized-controlled trials and PRISMA for evidence syntheses. Most journals do not require reviewers to use specific tools to assess the quality of studies or strength of recommendations; as a result, publication in a peer-reviewed journal is not a good proxy for quality.



Four of the forms of evidence that decision-makers typically encounter are now available as **‘living’ evidence products**, meaning they are regularly updated as new data are added or new studies are published. Many such living evidence products began as part of the COVID-19 evidence response. Fewer exist in sectors other than health. We provide examples below.

Many government policymakers and other decision-makers have come to expect such regular updating for COVID-19 and will likely start to ask why such products can’t be maintained for other high-priority societal challenges where there is significant uncertainty and a high likelihood of evidence emerging to address that uncertainty.

| Forms of evidence | Examples of living evidence products |
|---------------------------|---|
| <p>Data analytics</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The WHO COVID-19 Dashboard provides a set of data analytics about the stringency of public-health measures being taken to address COVID-19, the UK Health Security Agency surveillance reports (bit.ly/3DeaSlc) provide a set of data analytics about COVID-19 in the UK, and Opportunity Insights’ Economic Tracker provides a set of data analytics about COVID-19 impacts on the economic prospects of people, businesses and communities in the US The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Weekly Tracker of Economic Activity provides a set of data analytics about economic activity for most OECD and G20 countries |
| <p>Modeling</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The European COVID-19 Forecast Hub presents every week a forecast of cases and deaths per week per 100,000 people – both overall and by country – based on an ensemble of models, while the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation COVID-19 Projections updates every two weeks a model of projected deaths from COVID-19, both those reported as COVID-19 and those attributed to COVID-19, that could be used to explore a range of scenarios (e.g., about mask use and vaccine uptake) in specific countries The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change presents every five-to-seven years an assessment report that draws on modeling of human-induced climate change, its impacts, and possible response options, although strictly speaking this is a synthesis of findings from models (which may or may not be living) informed by a robust process of inter-model comparisons (which is undertaken by different scientists for each assessment report – see bit.ly/3wKQy8D for an example) |
| <p>Evidence syntheses</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> COVID-END living evidence synthesis #6 provides updates every two weeks about COVID-19 vaccine effectiveness against variants, and COVID-NMA updates weekly evidence syntheses about all drug treatments for COVID-19 (and later added preventive therapies and vaccines) The Global Carbon Project updates annually, based on modeling and empirical studies, estimates of the five major components of the global carbon budget (anthropogenic carbon-dioxide emissions and their redistribution among the atmosphere, ocean and terrestrial biosphere in a changing climate) and their associated uncertainties |
| <p>Guidelines</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Living WHO Guideline on Drugs for COVID-19 provides updates every one-to-four months about COVID-19 drug treatments, and the National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence Task Force updates weekly evidence-based COVID-19 guidelines for Australian health professionals The Education Endowment Foundation maintains living guidance for schools as part of their Teaching and Learning Toolkit, such as the one addressing teaching-assistant interventions |

Many individuals and groups bring forward what they call evidence to address societal challenges. **‘Best evidence’** in a given national (or sub-national) context – in the form of national (or sub-national) evidence drawn from the best available studies (i.e., what has been learned in that context) and global evidence drawn from the best available evidence syntheses (i.e., what has been learned from around the world, including how it varies by groups and contexts) – **needs to be differentiated from ‘other things’** that are sometimes presented as evidence, such as a single study, expert opinion, an expert panel, and a jurisdictional scan. Each of these other things brings with them a risk (column 2 below). At the same time, there are ways to get more value from them (columns 3 and 4 below).

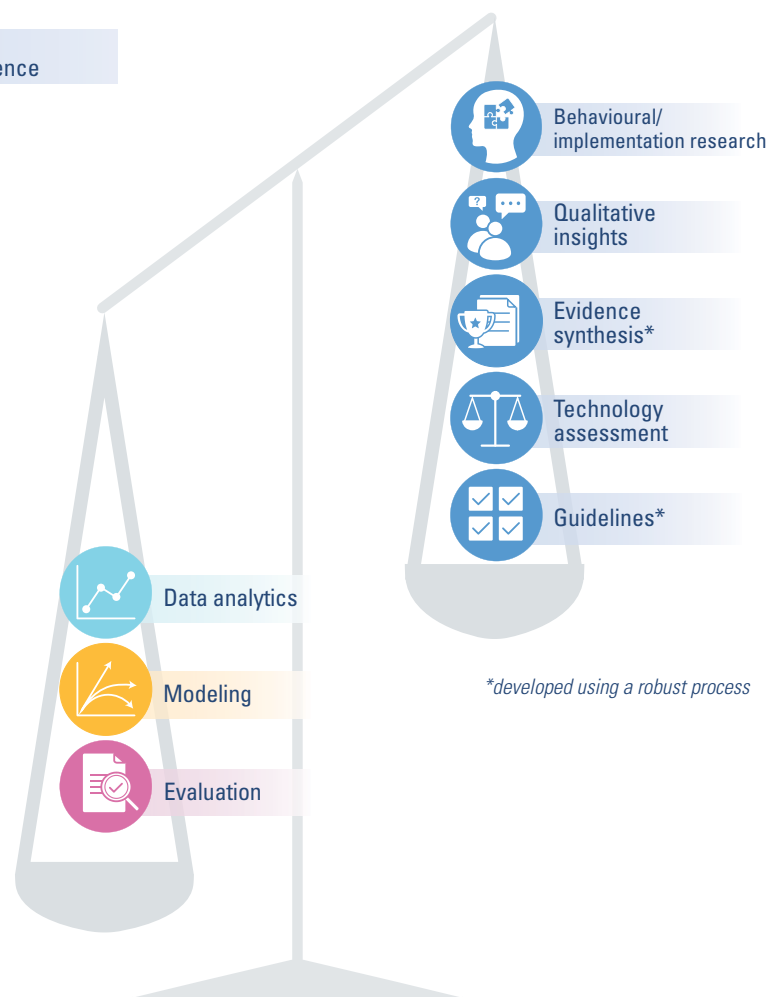
| If presented with... | ...which brings with it a risk of... | ...then... | ...or better yet... |
|--|---|--|--|
| Single study <i>(including preprints)</i> | ‘Hubcap chasing,’ or giving attention to each study that is actively promoted by the authors, their media-relations office or others (as happened with the high-risk-of-bias study about hydroxychloroquine and the now retracted study about a link between vaccines and autism) | Ask for a critical appraisal of the study using widely accepted quality criteria (to understand the risk of bias) and recognize that a statistically significant finding (at the 0.05 level) may be found by chance in one in 20 studies | Add the study to a ‘living’ evidence synthesis where it can be understood alongside other studies addressing the same question (or consider it as one of many types of national or sub-national evidence to be put alongside the best global evidence) |
| Expert opinion | ‘Squeaky wheel getting the grease’ / ‘eminence-based’ (rather than evidence-informed) decision-making, or giving attention to those who command the greatest attention by virtue of persistence, reputation or other factors (as happened with widely viewed television shows about the Scared Straight crime-prevention program even after evidence syntheses had found evidence of harm and no evidence of benefit) | Ask the expert to share the evidence (ideally evidence syntheses) on which the opinion is based, as well as the methods used to identify, assess, select and synthesize it | Engage the expert in working through what specific evidence syntheses mean for a specific jurisdiction, or in challenging ways of thinking with different forms of evidence (or ask the expert what evidence would convince them they were wrong) |
| Expert panel | GOBSATT, or ‘good old boys sitting around the table’ offering their personal opinion | Ask the panel members to share the evidence (ideally evidence syntheses) on which their input and recommendations are based, as well as the methods used to identify, assess, select and synthesize it | Add methods experts to the panel (or secretariat), pre-circulate the best local (national or sub-national) and global evidence, support robust deliberation, and make explicit which recommendations are based on what strength of evidence |
| Jurisdictional scan | ‘Groupthink,’ or people in many jurisdictions relying on people in one jurisdiction who are willing to share their experiences and innovations, but haven’t yet evaluated them | Ask or look for any available supporting evidence or plans for generating it | |

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a global crisis marked by the need for rapid-fire decision-making by high-level government authorities over several 'waves', and by both significant uncertainty and a quickly evolving (and often indirect) evidence base. In many jurisdictions, evidence appeared to play a more visible role in government policymaking during the COVID-19 pandemic than it has in many decades. That said, misinformation flourished, and citizens and other stakeholders struggled to understand why the evidence changed over time. 'Other things' than best evidence often had **greater visibility** than best evidence, and some forms of evidence often had greater visibility than others.

'Other things' than best evidence that were more typically encountered by COVID-19 decision-makers



Forms of evidence that were more typically encountered by COVID-19 decision-makers



**developed using a robust process*

Every country has a **national evidence infrastructure** that includes many evidence-related structures and processes. Within this national evidence infrastructure, we distinguish the evidence-support system, the evidence-implementation system, and the research system. Giving much greater attention to the evidence-support system, and ongoing attention to the evidence-implementation system, will be key to future efforts to use evidence in addressing societal challenges.

When decision-makers ask a question, particularly government policymakers and organizational leaders, they need to be supported in a timely way in using the evidence that already exists. Decision-makers, particularly professionals and citizens, need to be supported to implement the changes that robust evidence demonstrates are needed. Meanwhile, researchers need to be enabled to invent new products and services, to develop new ways of thinking, and to critique the status quo. They also need to be encouraged to engage more actively with decision-makers to ensure relevance and applicability, to use technology more effectively to make research processes more efficient, to report their findings more transparently and without ‘spin,’ and to create versions of the evidence they produce that can be accessed, understood and made actionable by decision-makers. The evidence emerging from their research that is ‘ready for prime time’ can then be drawn into the evidence-support and evidence-implementation systems.



| Evidence-support system |
|---|
| <p>Grounded in an understanding of a national (or sub-national) context (including time constraints), demand-driven, and focused on contextualizing the evidence for a given decision in an equity-sensitive way</p> <p>Examples of infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence-support coordination office (for all of government, with or without additional offices in key departments or ministries) • evidence units with expertise in each of eight forms of evidence (e.g., behavioural-insights unit) • processes to elicit and prioritize evidence needs, find and package evidence that meets these needs within set time constraints (and build additional evidence as part of ongoing evaluations), build capacity for evidence use (e.g., evidence-use workshops and handbook), prompt evidence use (e.g., cabinet submission checklist), and document evidence use (e.g., evidence-use metrics) <p><i>While such infrastructure is most relevant to government policymakers and the leaders of very large organizations, similar types of infrastructure can be tailored to the leaders of smaller organizations as well as professionals and citizens</i></p> |

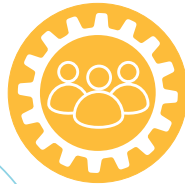
| Evidence-implementation system |
|--|
| <p>Grounded in an understanding of evidence-related processes, driven by a mix of demand and supply considerations, and focused on cycles of synthesizing evidence, developing recommendations, disseminating them to decision-makers, actively supporting their implementation, evaluating their impacts, and incorporating lessons learned in the next cycle</p> <p>Examples of infrastructure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evidence-synthesis and guideline units • evidence-implementation units to prioritize what to implement, identify barriers and facilitators to implementation, and design strategies that address barriers and leverage facilitators • processes to build evidence into existing workflows (e.g., electronic client records, digital decision-support systems, web portals, and quality-improvement initiatives) and share it across them <p><i>While such infrastructure is most relevant to professionals and citizens, similar types of infrastructure can be tailored to government policymakers and organizational leaders</i></p> |

Role of evidence intermediaries

As the term suggests, evidence intermediaries are entities that work (or individuals who work) 'in between' decision-makers and evidence producers. They support decision-makers with best evidence and they support evidence producers with insights and opportunities for making an impact with evidence. There are many types of evidence intermediaries, and some of these evidence intermediaries may use other labels to describe themselves, such as knowledge brokers. They may use many different **strategies to support the use of best evidence**.

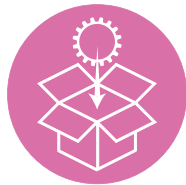
Improving the climate for evidence use

e.g., comparing a local (national or sub-national) evidence-support system to a high-functioning evidence-support system, or comparing a local evidence-implementation system to a high-functioning evidence-implementation system, using prompts like this list of strategies that evidence intermediaries can use



Prioritizing and co-producing evidence

e.g., co-producing – with decision-makers – new local (national or sub-national) evidence specific to the jurisdiction of focus (data analytics, modeling, evaluations, behavioural / implementation research, qualitative insights), synthesizing the best evidence globally (evidence synthesis), and translating global and local evidence into local evidence support specific to the jurisdiction (technology assessments and guidelines, as well as modeling if it is undertaken with this intent)



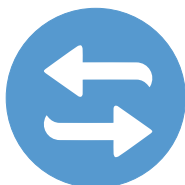
Packaging evidence for, and 'pushing' it to, decision-makers

e.g., integrating different forms of evidence into innovative types of evidence products (e.g., data analytics to clarify a problem and its causes, evidence synthesis to describe the likely benefits and harms of an option to address a problem, and behavioural science to develop an implementation plan)



Facilitating 'pull' by decision-makers

e.g., maintaining one-stop evidence shops that are optimized for decision-makers' needs (e.g., Education Endowment Foundation [UK] and What Works Clearinghouse [US] for educators; Evidence Aid for humanitarian-aid providers)



Exchanging with decision-makers

e.g., convening deliberative dialogues to work through – based on both best evidence and all of the other factors that may influence decision-making – a problem and its causes, options to address it, key implementation considerations, and next steps for different constituencies (e.g., stakeholder dialogues and citizen panels that are informed by pre-circulated evidence briefs and citizen briefs)

Five types of strategies evidence intermediaries can use to support the use of best evidence

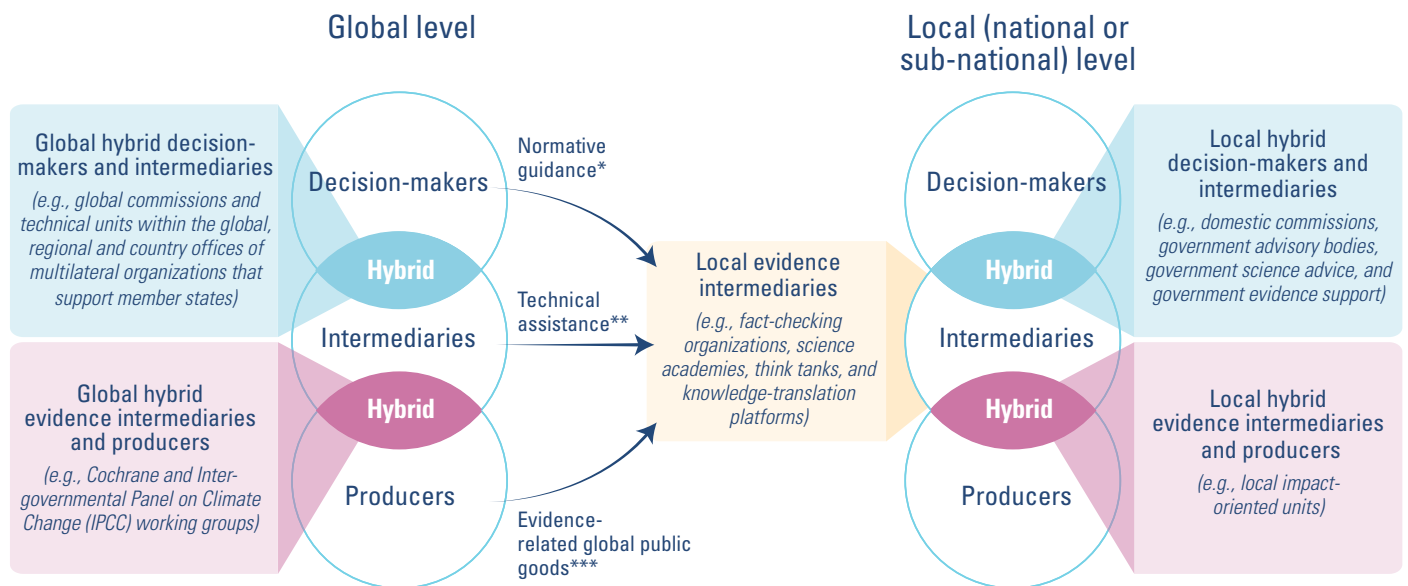
Need for global public goods and equitably distributed capacities

A paradox keenly felt by those supporting the use of evidence to address societal challenges is that there are both significant gaps in the global public goods that evidence intermediaries rely on, and significant waste arising from how these global public goods are produced and how their use is supported. Evidence-related **global public goods** and related functions include: 1) robust prioritization, coordination and registration processes to ensure that the right globally relevant evidence, such as evidence syntheses, is produced and that wasted effort is avoided; 2) rigorous standards to ensure that the best evidence is available for use in decision-making, such as a body of evidence that has been graded for the certainty of the evidence it provides; 3) open-access publications to ensure that the best evidence can be freely accessed when needed; and 4) robust prioritization of efforts to support evidence intermediaries in using global public goods to support decision-making.

The **capacities needed to support evidence use** should be distributed across four dimensions:

- vertically across levels (global and local, where local can mean national, state or provincial, and municipal jurisdictions, as well as large organizations), with capacities concentrated globally where they involve evidence-related global public goods (e.g., syntheses of the best evidence globally) or there are strong arguments about economies of scale
- functionally across domains (decision-makers who use evidence, evidence intermediaries who support the use of evidence, and producers of the eight forms of evidence), with capacities concentrated wherever there are comparative advantages
- horizontally across local jurisdictions, with capacities for using and supporting the use of evidence equitably distributed across all jurisdictions (regardless of whether they are high- or low- and middle-income countries)
- substantively across societal challenges (or Sustainable Development Goals).

We illustrate the first and second of these dimensions below.



* e.g., UN Assembly resolutions and UN agency guidelines

** e.g., capacity to respond to questions with best evidence

*** e.g., Cochrane evidence syntheses and IPCC modeling

Recommendations

Those best positioned to make the changes necessary to ensure that evidence is consistently used to address societal challenges include:

- multilateral organizations like the UN system, multilateral development banks, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the G20, and others
- national and sub-national government policymakers
- organizational leaders, professionals and citizens
- evidence intermediaries, including those who do not currently function as evidence intermediaries (such as journalists for the most part)
- evidence producers, particularly impact-oriented units engaged in producing and supporting the use of data analytics, modeling, evaluation, behavioural / implementation research, qualitative insights, evidence syntheses, technology assessment / cost-effectiveness analysis, and guidelines.

Here we provide an **overview of the Evidence Commission's 24 recommendations** in an infographic, with the eight most-important recommendations in bold. Their importance stems from how they provide the framing [1, 4, 13], structures and processes [5, 14, 15], accountabilities [3] or funding [24] from which so many other actions can follow. As a reminder, we use the word 'evidence' in these recommendations (as in the rest of the report) to mean research evidence, and specifically all eight forms of evidence described previously (data analytics, modeling, evaluation, behavioural / implementation research, qualitative insights, evidence syntheses, technology assessment / cost-effectiveness analysis, and guidelines). We use 'best evidence' to mean – in a given national (or sub-national) context – national (or sub-national) evidence drawn from the best available studies (i.e., what has been learned in that context) and global evidence drawn from the best available evidence syntheses (i.e., what has been learned from around the world, including how it varies by groups and contexts).



All who can take action

Two recommendations, one a **wake-up call** [1] and the second a proposed new standard for responding – to ask for evidence – any time a claim is made (e.g., this intervention works) [2]



Multilateral organizations

Two recommendations, one calling for a **resolution by multi-lateral organizations** [3] and the second a **landmark report** [4]



Government policymakers

Seven recommendations:

- four calling for fit-for-purpose national (and sub-national) **evidence-support systems** (and broader evidence infrastructures) [5], evidence-support staff and partnerships [6], science advisors [7], and advisory bodies [8]
- one calling for building a more diversified evidence base [9]
- two related to open science [10] and artificial intelligence [11]



Organizational leaders, professionals and citizens

Two recommendations:

- one calling for every significant organizational association, professional body and impact-oriented civil-society group to contribute meaningfully to its national (or sub-national) evidence-support system [12]
- one calling on citizens to consider the many ways they can use best **evidence in everyday life**, and to consider supporting politicians (and others) who enable this [13]



Evidence intermediaries

Three recommendations:

- one addressed to **dedicated evidence intermediaries** [14], and another addressed to **news and social-media platforms** [15]
- one more generally calling for the timely and responsive matching of best evidence to the question asked [16]



Evidence producers

Seven recommendations:

- five addressing their roles in: 1) filling gaps and adhering to standards [17]; 2) responding, referring or working with others [18]; 3) learning from evidence groups in other sectors [19]; 4) being prepared to pivot for global emergencies [20]; and 5) making evidence understandable [21]
- one addressed specifically to academic institutions [22], and another addressed to journals [23]



Funders

One recommendation calling for **spending 'smarter,' and ideally more, on evidence support**, particularly on national (and sub-national) evidence-support systems and broader evidence infrastructures [24]

The **eight most-important recommendations** are listed below. For each recommendation we list the related sections of the report that provide the context, concepts or vocabulary that underpin it (in the order that they are introduced). Where relevant, we also list the global reports that are aligned with an Evidence Commission recommendation. The global-commission reports are typically aligned only with part of a recommendation or its rationale (e.g., being attentive to equity, investing in select forms of evidence such as evaluation, and holding decision-makers to account), whereas reports from other global entities tend to be more fulsomely aligned.



All decision-makers, evidence intermediaries and impact-oriented evidence producers

1

Wake-up call — Decision-makers, evidence intermediaries and impact-oriented evidence producers should recognize the scale and nature of the problem. Evidence – in all of the eight forms addressed in this report – is not being systematically used by government policymakers, organizational leaders, professionals and citizens to equitably address societal challenges. Instead decision-makers too often rely on inefficient (and sometimes harmful) informal feedback systems. The result is poor decisions that lead to failures to improve lives, avoidable harm to citizens, and wasted resources.

The cohort of decision-makers who were involved in COVID-19 decision-making, especially high-level government policymakers, now has direct experience with using many forms of evidence and with leveraging strategies that support its use. They also have direct experience with the challenges that can arise, leading evidence to be disregarded or misused. They may also have heard about the evidence supports available to their peers in other countries, such as living evidence syntheses, and wondered why they are not available or used in their own country. This cohort is uniquely well positioned to systematize what went well before and during the pandemic, and to build or improve their respective country's evidence-support system in ways that address what didn't go well.

Related sections: **4.13** Weaknesses in many COVID-19 evidence-support systems | **6.2** Equitably distributed capacities needed to support evidence use | **4.1** Forms in which evidence is typically encountered in decision-making | **4.7** Living evidence products



Multilateral organizations

3

Resolution by multilateral organizations — The UN, the G20 and other multilateral organizations should endorse a resolution that commits these multilateral organizations and their member states to broaden their conception of evidence, and to support evidence-related global public goods and equitably distributed capacities to produce, share and use evidence. The 'quintet of change' meant to support the UN's transformation from 2021 to 2025 explicitly includes data analytics and behavioural/implementation research, implicitly includes evaluation (under 'performance and results orientation'), and is silent on the other needed forms of evidence.(1) The UN and other multilateral organizations (including the global commissions they sponsor) continue to rely on an 'expert knows best' model. The reinvigoration of the UN Secretary-General Scientific Advisory Board provides an opportunity to do better.(2) Much can be learned from the organizations that have pioneered more systematic and transparent approaches to using evidence, such as the World Health Organization's (WHO) Guidelines Review Committee (that develops normative guidance) and the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Related sections: **4.2** Definitions of forms in which evidence is typically encountered | **6.1** Global public goods needed to support evidence use | **6.2** Equitably distributed capacities needed to support evidence use | **5.5** UN system entities' use of evidence syntheses in their work | **7.1** Insights from an analysis of global-commission recommendations | **Aligned report:** (3)*

*Note that the citations for 'aligned reports' can be found in the full report.

4

Landmark report — **The World Bank should dedicate an upcoming World Development Report to providing the design of the evidence architecture needed globally, regionally and nationally, including the required investments in evidence-related global public goods and in equitably distributed capacities to produce, share and use evidence.** The World Bank's steps towards being the 'knowledge bank' have been too tentative. Their work to date emphasizes some forms of evidence (e.g., data analytics) and largely disregards others (e.g., evidence synthesis). A landmark report can establish a common language about evidence and evidence use that everybody – decision-makers, evidence intermediaries and impact-oriented evidence producers – can use. It can also lay out the many steps involved in doing better, including the World Bank's role, as well as the roles of its global partnerships and of other UN agencies, in supporting evidence-related global public goods like evidence syntheses.

Related sections: 6.1 Global public goods needed to support evidence use | 6.2 Equitably distributed capacities needed to support evidence use | 1.6 Timeline of key developments in using evidence to address societal challenges | **Aligned report:** (4)



Government policymakers

5

National (and sub-national) evidence-support systems — **Every national (and sub-national) government should review their existing evidence-support system (and broader evidence infrastructure), fill the gaps both internally and through partnerships, and report publicly on their progress.** For example, many governments do not have an evidence-support coordination office, a behavioural-insights unit, an evidence-use handbook and related metrics, and other features of an ideal evidence-support system (as described in **section 4.14**). Each government can also review their 'mainstream' structures and processes (e.g., budgeting, planning, monitoring and auditing) to formalize the 'ways in' for evidence. Without the right evidence-support system, staff will not have the capacity, opportunity and motivation to use evidence in government policymaking.

Some governments may choose to formalize their effects in legislation, like the U.S. Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act. Many governments can also support the use of evidence in the everyday work of organizational leaders and professionals, and in the everyday lives of citizens, and can explicitly respect Indigenous rights and ways of knowing in their efforts.

Related sections: 4.14 Features of an ideal national evidence infrastructure | 3.3 Government policymakers and the context for their use of evidence | 4.10 Indigenous rights and ways of knowing | **Aligned report:** (3)



Organizational leaders, professionals and citizens

13

Evidence in everyday life — **Citizens should consider making decisions about their and their families' well-being based on best evidence; spending their money on products and services that are backed by best evidence; volunteering their time and donating money to initiatives that use evidence to make decisions about what they do and how they do it; and supporting politicians who commit to using best evidence to address societal challenges and who commit (along with others) to supporting the use of evidence in everyday life.** Government policymakers, among others, need to ensure that citizens have access to best evidence, evidence-checked claims, and simple-to-use evidence-backed resources and websites to make informed choices at all times, not just during global crises. They also need to help build citizens' media and information literacy, provide the transparency needed for citizens to know when decisions, services and initiatives are based on best evidence, and more generally create a culture where evidence is understood, valued and used.

Related sections: 3.6 Citizens and the context for their use of evidence | 4.11 Misinformation and infodemics | **Aligned reports:** (3; 5; 10; 16; 18; 19)



Evidence intermediaries

14

Dedicated evidence intermediaries — **Dedicated evidence intermediaries should step forward to fill gaps left by government, provide continuity if staff turn-over in government is frequent, and leverage strong connections to global networks.** Evidence intermediaries work ‘in between’ decision-makers and evidence producers, supporting the former with best evidence and the latter with insights and opportunities for making an impact with evidence. As with government science advisors, intermediaries need to be able to find and communicate diverse forms of evidence and to sustain (at least a part of) a high-performing evidence-support system. COVID-19 has shown – in some countries at some times – the value of intermediaries partnering with community leaders to engage those who may have been ill-served in the past by evidence that was inappropriately generated, shared or used.

Related sections: 5.1 Types of evidence intermediaries | 5.3 Strategies used by evidence intermediaries | 4.2 Definitions of forms in which evidence is typically encountered | 4.14 Features of an ideal national evidence infrastructure | 1.7 Equity considerations | **Aligned reports:** (8; 20)

15

News and social-media platforms — **News and social-media platforms should build relationships with dedicated evidence intermediaries who can help leverage sources of best evidence, and with evidence producers who can help communicate evidence effectively, as well as ensure their algorithms present best evidence and combat misinformation.** Journalists and fact checkers need to become familiar with evidence syntheses and use them to ask specific questions about any evidence they are presented with and any ‘other things’ that may be offered as a substitute for best evidence. Familiarity with evidence syntheses includes: the importance of contextualizing and situating new studies in a broader body of evidence; the rationale for preferring syntheses of high-quality studies over single, small, poorly executed studies; the concept of scientific uncertainty; the evolving nature of evidence and how this relates to emerging and replacement guidance; the importance and role of bias and conflict of interest; and the importance of reporting that avoids ‘spin.’

Related sections: 5.1 Types of evidence intermediaries | 4.4 Interplay of local and global evidence | 4.8 Best evidence versus other things (and how to get the most of other things) | 4.11 Misinformation and infodemics | **Aligned reports:** (21; 22)



Funders

24

Funding — **Governments, foundations and other funders should spend ‘smarter,’ and ideally more, on evidence support.** They can commit to ensuring that 1% of funding is allocated to national (and sub-national) evidence infrastructures (with a reasonable share to the evidence-support system and evidence-implementation system, as described in **section 4.14**), and they can monitor adherence to standards. They can ensure that 10% of this funding is allocated to evidence-related global public goods if this responsibility is not taken up by multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and other UN agencies. High-income country governments and global funders can dedicate 1% of their international-development funding to equitably distributed capacities for evidence use.

Related sections: 4.14 Features of an ideal national evidence infrastructure | 6.1 Global public goods needed to support evidence use | 6.2 Equitably distributed capacities needed to support evidence use | **Aligned report:** (3)