

Engaging with citizen partners in evidence synthesis

About evidence syntheses at the McMaster Health Forum

The Forum regularly receives urgent requests for summaries of the best-available evidence (what we call evidence syntheses) from decision-makers, leaders of systems, organizations and professional groups, researchers and/or citizens to help address pressing health- and social-system issues. For example, we work with federal government agencies (e.g., the Public Health Agency of Canada), provincial governments (e.g., the British Columbia and Ontario Ministries of Health) and other stakeholders (e.g., Canadian Medical Association and Canadian Partnership Against Cancer) to ensure evidence can be used to help inform decisions. Sometimes we prepare evidence syntheses that address topics that are relevant globally, which we call global public goods. These often take longer to prepare as they are more comprehensive. Either type of synthesis can be routinely updated, which we call a living evidence synthesis. Read more about some of the recent topics we have addressed [here](#).

In the table below, we describe the different types of evidence syntheses that we produced by the timeline in which they are prepared. Each type of evidence synthesis highlights why we think it's important to engage citizens.

Type of evidence synthesis	Time-line	How is it done? What's the scope?	Goal	What citizens could contribute
• Rapid evidence profiles • Living evidence profiles (updated at regular intervals)	1.5 days	• Key insights from highly relevant evidence syntheses (and sometimes primary studies where no evidence syntheses exist) identified from targeted searches of databases • Draw on the best available synthesized research evidence and experiences from other countries and from Canadian provinces and territories	Profile evidence and experiences quickly	• Identify knowledge gaps from citizens' perspectives • Help contextualize and interpret findings from a citizen's perspective • Help determine key messages that resonates with citizens • Review plain language summaries and/or infographics
• Rapid evidence syntheses • Living evidence syntheses (updated at regular intervals)	2-10 weeks	• Synthesis of findings (rather than a profile of key insights) from all relevant evidence syntheses and primary studies identified (with scope depending on the timeline specified by the requestor) • Analysis of experiences from relevant jurisdictions (with number of jurisdictions and depth of analysis depending on the timeline specified by the requestor)	Synthesize evidence and experiences quickly	• Provide feedback on important outcomes to extract • Help contextualize and interpret findings from a citizen's perspective • Help determine key messages that resonate with citizens • Identify knowledge gaps from citizens' perspectives • Co-produce or review plain-language summaries and infographics • Comment on the plans for sharing (disseminating) the research findings to the general public or particular population groups • Co-author the report or manuscript as per criteria of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors
• Full systematic reviews • Full living evidence syntheses	2.5+ months	• More in-depth analysis in terms of: ○ scope (e.g., number of sources searched, additional outcomes considered) ○ methods (e.g., duplicate study selection, data extraction, risk-of-bias assessment and additional analysis) • Full evidence syntheses (or enhancements to previous versions) • Evidence syntheses with interpretive and/or qualitative designs (e.g., development of concepts and theories/interpretations,	Comprehensively synthesize evidence, including global public goods (where benefits affect all citizens of the world such as control of global diseases, clean	Same as above, plus: • Co-develop or provide feedback on the protocol (the plan) or work plan • Prioritize outcomes of interest • Provide feedback on important outcomes to extract • Provide specific feedback about interpretation of results and/or give suggestions for what the key messages should be

		methods to better understand complexity and context) or statistical analysis (e.g., meta-analysis)	environment, education)	
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Why engage citizens and why should they care?

Evidence syntheses are used government decision-makers and leaders of systems, organizations and professional groups to address pressing challenges faced in health and social systems. They therefore help address problems and challenges citizens face. We want citizen input into evidence syntheses as they are important for informing decisions that affect every citizen.

The question(s) we address in evidence syntheses may focus on helping decision-makers in:

1. understanding a problem and its causes
2. selecting options for addressing a problem
3. identifying implementation considerations
4. monitoring implementation and evaluating impacts.

The synthesized evidence may be used by decision-makers to create policies, guidelines, and healthcare recommendations that impact citizens.

- Has the synthesis prioritized and extracted outcomes of interest to citizens?
- Do the findings resonate with citizens? Are they being looked at from a citizen lens?
- Have knowledge gaps from citizens' perspectives been identified?
- Are we communicating how evidence is used in policymaking?

Each synthesis includes, at a minimum, a policy analysis in the form of a profile or synthesis of the best-available evidence. The evidence can be contextualized with a systems and/or political analysis.

- A systems analysis identifies how relevant parts of a health or social system currently work, which can help with identifying options for doing things differently.
- A political analysis provides insight about factors that may affect whether and how issues move onto government agendas and policy decisions are made.

Systems and/or political analyses can identify these insights by reviewing policy documents, conducting jurisdictional scans and /or conducting interviews with key informants.

Contextualized evidence syntheses can be used to inform value-added processes such as:

- [horizon-scanning panels](#) designed to identify, refine and prioritize key health- and social-system challenges
- deliberative processes (e.g., [citizen panels](#) and [stakeholder dialogues](#)) designed to [spark action](#) to address pressing challenges.

All evidence syntheses and the outputs from valued-added processes (e.g., panel and dialogue summaries) are made publicly available on the [McMaster Health Forum website](#). We also publish some products in peer-reviewed journals.

How do we collaborate with citizen partners?

There are many roles that citizen partners can play when they join an evidence synthesis team. These roles can depend on the timeline and nature of the request. For example, in very short timelines such 1-5 days, citizens may be best engaged by sharing the scope and framing of the request and the final report to ensure citizen perspectives are identified and incorporated. For these ultra-rapid requests, we'll ask if they have interest in joining teams where the involvement is intensive. The involvement will of course depend on their availability during a specific time period.

Many requests need to address specific questions to inform decision-making process. In these situations, there can still be opportunities to provide insights that can be taken into account in framing the question or organizing the evidence identified. Even in situations when it may not be feasible for citizen partners to shape the research question, they can still provide valuable input about areas where future research was needed. This can be very important for living evidence syntheses where future versions can include enhancements to what has already been done.

Citation: Lavis JN, Smith M, Wilson MG. Engaging with citizen partners in evidence synthesis. Hamilton, Canada: McMaster Health Forum, 2024.
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