

Evidence maps

An evidence map (or Evidence & Gap Map) in research is a visual tool that systematically organizes and displays the entire body of evidence (studies, reviews) on a topic, showing what's known, what's uncertain, and where major gaps exist, helping policymakers and researchers quickly see "what works," identify research needs, and guide decision-making.

Key characteristics

- **Systematic methodology**: Evidence maps use rigorous and transparent methods for searching, screening, and selecting studies, similar to the initial stages of a systematic review
- **Broad scope**: Unlike a systematic review, which typically addresses a narrow, specific question (such as the effectiveness of a single intervention), an evidence map tackles a broad research field or multiple interventions and outcomes
- **Descriptive, not evaluative**: Evidence maps describe what evidence exists, its characteristics (e.g., study design, population, location), and its distribution
- **Visual presentation**: The results are usually presented in a user-friendly, interactive format, such as a matrix, bubble plot, or online database, allowing interest-holders to easily navigate the information and identify trends or gaps

Key functions

- **Visual overview**: Provides a clear, graphical summary of a broad research area
- **Identify gaps**: Pinpoints areas with little or no evidence, guiding future research agendas
- **Assess evidence strength**: Shows the quality and certainty of evidence, often using colors or symbols
- **Informs decisions**: Helps policymakers and practitioners understand what "works" to support evidence-based practice

Steps to create an evidence map

- **Framework development**: Researchers define key dimensions (e.g., interventions vs. outcomes, populations, study types)
- **Literature search**: A systematic search for relevant studies (systematic reviews, primary research) is conducted
- **Data mapping**: Studies are categorized and plotted onto the framework
- **Visualization**: A matrix or interactive map is created, often with color-coding for evidence quality or effect

How can citizens support the development of an evidence map

Citizens can provide essential feedback on the following elements:

- **Framework**: Help us define what categories to include and ensure they reflect what's important to you
- **Visualization**: Tell us if the map is clear, easy to use and works for different audiences
- **Report**: Share what findings matter most to you or if there is anything you think is missing so we make sure to highlight it

Examples of evidence maps

Digital interventions to reduce social isolation and loneliness in older adults

Current State of Cancer Diagnosis in Canada

Adapted from: What is Evidence Mapping?
https://sprinto.com/blog/evidence-mapping/

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