McMaster University | Health Forum

Contextualized evidence syntheses

Overview

The Forum prepares timely, demand-driven contextualized evidence syntheses that address pressing health and social system issues faced by government policymakers and other types of decision-makers. These products can be produced using an 'all hands-on deck' approach from our team to ensure time-sensitive advisory and decision-making processes can be informed by robust evidence. For ultra-rapid timelines, we produce **rapid evidence profiles**, and with weeks-long timelines, we produce a more in-depth **rapid evidence synthesis**. We also draw from a panel of citizen partners to engage citizens in our contextualized evidence-synthesis work, and work with a citizen leader to support their active engagement. We continue to explore the safe and responsible incorporation of AI in our workflows.

Both of these products can also adopt a living approach, which can: 1) ensure that new evidence is identified and incorporated over time; and 2) enable a process where an initial version can be produced to meet a time-sensitive deadline and then enhanced over time in scope (e.g., by including additional questions to address) and methods (e.g., by searching more databases, conducting risk-of-bias assessments of single studies, and conducting more sophisticated analyses). With more time, we can also prepare 'global public goods,' or fulsome evidence syntheses, which can also adopt a living approach.

Types of evidence-synthesis products and timelines

The table below details the different types of evidence-synthesis products, their estimated timelines, scope and suggested use cases. To view examples of any of these types of products or to find any that we have completed topics of interest to you, please browse our searchable products page.

Product	Timelines in which it can be executed	Product scope
Rapid evidence profile	One to five business days	• Profiles key insights from existing evidence syntheses (and sometimes primary studies where no evidence syntheses exist) focusing on what is known and identifying where there are gaps in the available evidence base • Can include supplementary approaches such as a profile of experiences from relevant jurisdictions identified from targeted searches of websites and documents (with the number of jurisdictions depending on the timeline specified by the requester) • Best used when evidence is needed in urgent timelines or as a first step in understanding 'what we already know' in a given topic area
Rapid evidence synthesis	Two to seven weeks	• Synthesizes key insights from all relevant evidence syntheses and single studies, typically contextualizing them to meet the evidence needs of a particular decision-maker • Can include an analysis of experiences from relevant jurisdictions (with the number of jurisdictions and depth of analysis depending on the timeline specified by the requester) • Best used when in-depth findings are needed with a relatively short turnaround time
Global 'public good' (or full evidence synthesis)	Two months and over	• Comprehensively synthesizes insights from all relevant evidence syntheses and single studies • Includes comprehensive methods such as study selection (conducted by two independent reviewers), risk-of-bias assessment, and additional analysis • Can include an analysis of experiences from relevant jurisdictions • Best used for 'high stakes' decisions where certainty in the evidence base is needed and when timelines are more flexible

Types of evidence-synthesis products and timelines

Our contextualized evidence syntheses address questions from across all stages of the policy cycle and are underpinned by a policy analysis (i.e., finding and using research evidence about clarifying a problem, framing options, and identifying implementation considerations). They can be complemented by systems analysis (i.e., analyzing information and contextual factors about how key parts of a health or social system work together to get a mix of programs, services and products to people who need them) and/or a political analysis (i.e., understanding factors that may affect government agenda setting and decision-making processes). These analyses may include using supplementary approaches such as conducting jurisdictional scans or key informant interviews to harness a range of insights to contextualize the evidence identified.
In addition, contextualized evidence syntheses can be used to inform deliberative processes (e.g., citizen panels and stakeholder dialogues) designed to spark action to address pressing challenges.

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