McMaster University | Health Forum

Health Systems Evidence:

Summary of key features and functions

A free online repository of pre-appraised, synthesized research evidence for health-system policymakers and stakeholders

www.healthsystemsevidence.org

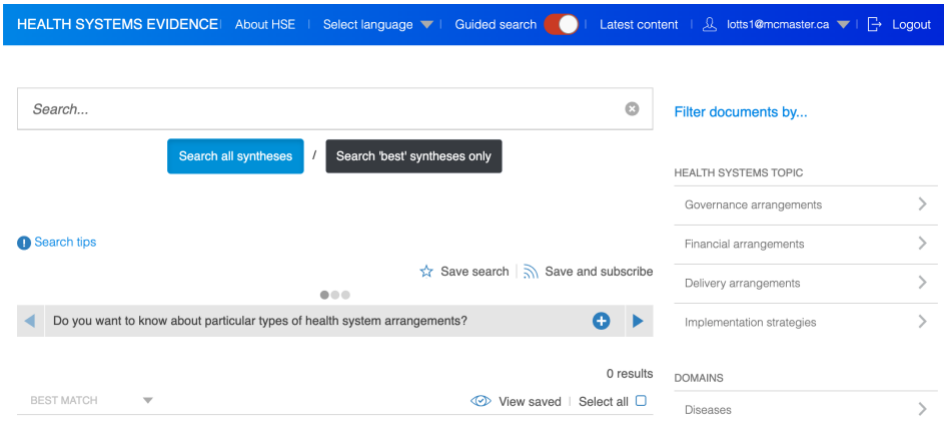
Key features

Health Systems Evidence is the world's most comprehensive, continuously updated repository of research evidence about governance, financial and delivery arrangements within health systems, and about implementation strategies that can support change in health systems. It supports policymakers, stakeholders and researchers who want to access the best available research evidence in a timely manner through several features, including:

- a powerful search engine and nested sort function to ensure the most relevant results are quickly identified, and a tool that allows you to search for only the 'best' evidence syntheses for a specific topic of interest (determined by prioritizing syntheses that have completed their search in the last five years, are at least medium quality and have access to a GRADE profile)
- an intuitive user interface that streamlines the process of conducting advanced searches through the application of filters for health system arrangements, sectors (e.g., primary care), areas of focus (e.g. specific countries), document features (e.g. type of document or publication date range) or any combination of these
- a guided search tool for users who want additional assistance in applying filters
- the ability to save documents or searches and subscribe to free, customized, monthly e-newsletters that provide links to newly added content in your area of interest
- independently assigned quality ratings for each included review
- hyperlinks to scientific abstracts, user-friendly summaries (when they exist), and all the included studies (labelled by country to facilitate local applicability assessments)
- responsive design, which automatically gives users access to the site in a format optimized for use on their device of choice (e.g. mobile, tablet or desktop)
- multi-lingual support – search Health Systems Evidence in English, Chinese, French, Portuguese and Spanish.

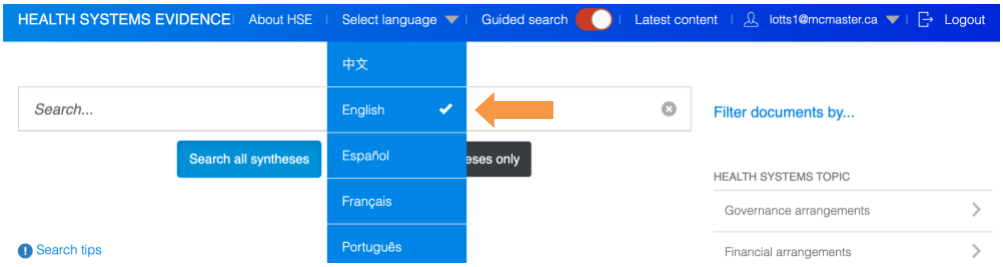
Search Health Systems Evidence on your mobile or desktop device

Health Systems optimizes the interface for the device you are using.



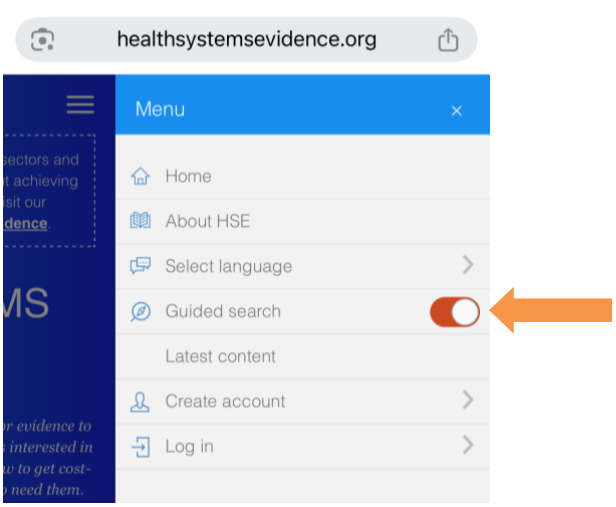
Choose your preferred language

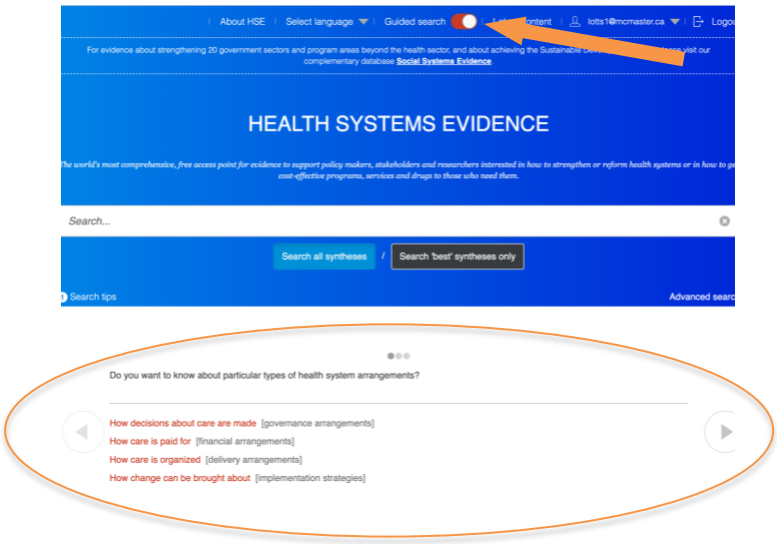
Select the language you prefer when using Health Systems Evidence.



Get help by using the guided search

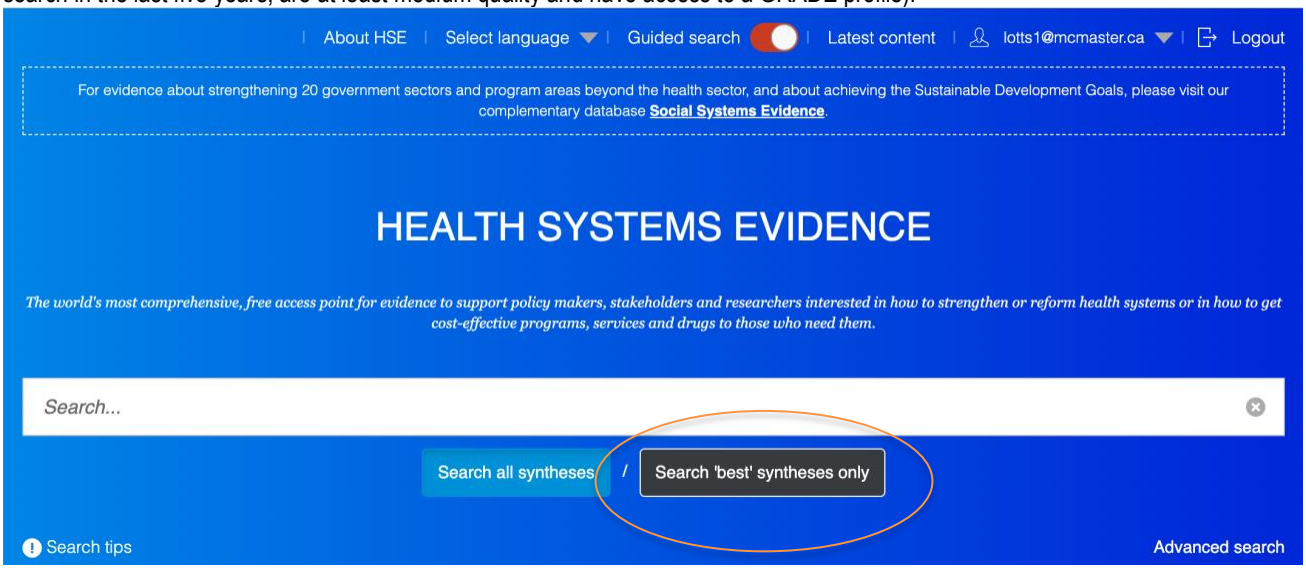
Respond to these questions to guide you in applying the filters available on Health Systems Evidence. The guided search can be turned off or on (indicated by the toggle at the top of the screen) and can be expanded or hidden on a mobile device.





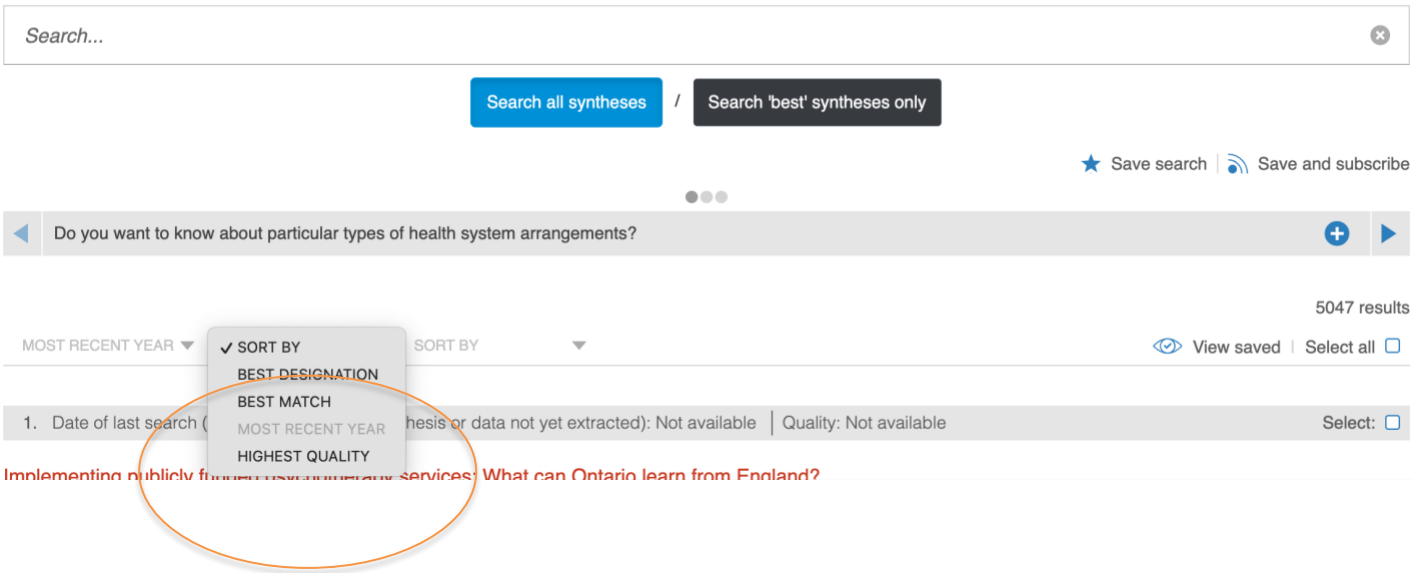
Search for the 'best' syntheses only

Narrow your search to the 'best' evidence syntheses for a specific topic of interest (determined by prioritizing syntheses that have completed their search in the last five years, are at least medium quality and have access to a GRADE profile).



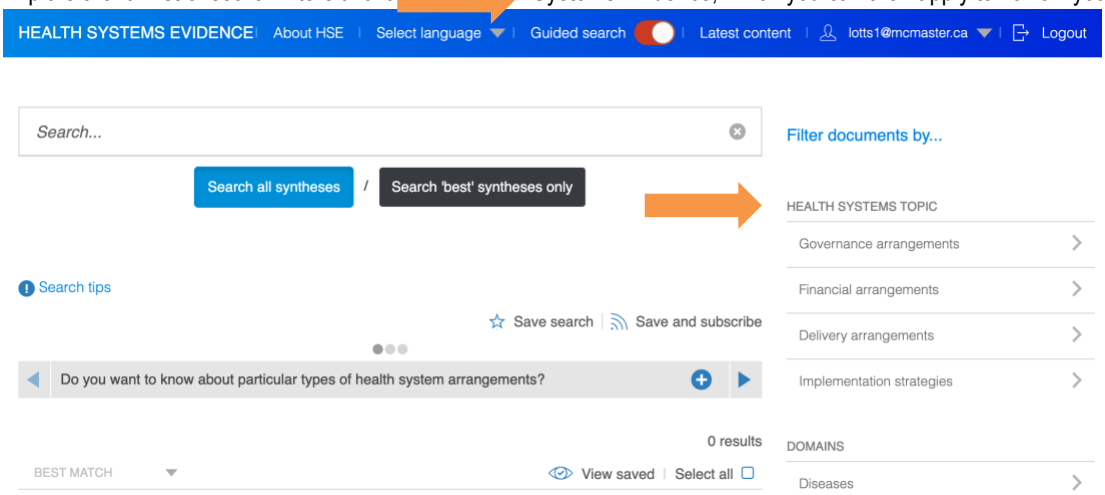
Sort your results

By default, results are displayed by 'best match.' Alternatively, you can use the nested sorting function to sort your search results by best designation, most recent year or highest quality. From there, you can further sort the results by the other criteria.

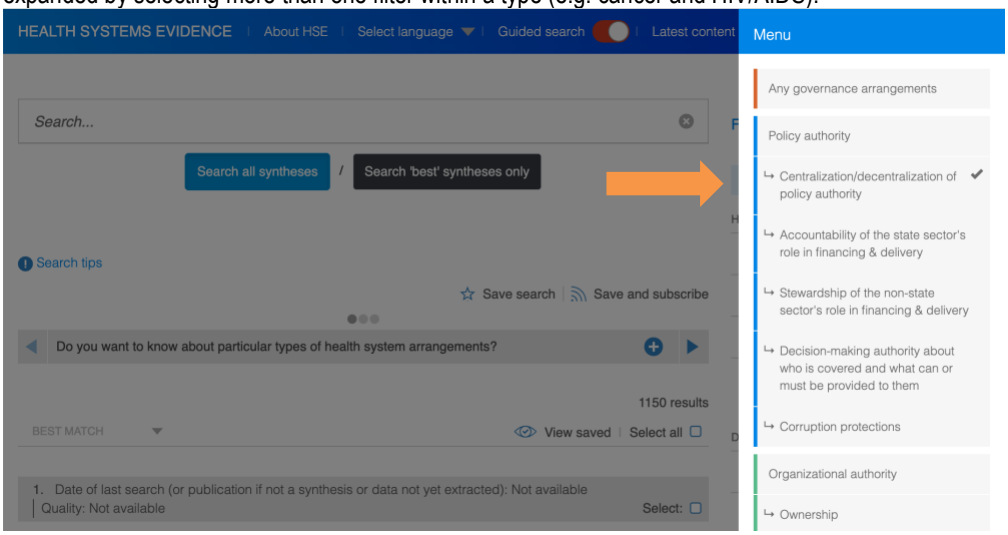


Apply advanced search filters

Explore the full list of search filters available on Health Systems Evidence, which you can then apply to narrow your search.



Narrow your search so that you retrieve documents that address the domains you're most interested in, focus on the country or region you work in and retrieve particular types of documents. Your results can be narrowed by combining filter types (e.g., system arrangements and diseases) and expanded by selecting more than one filter within a type (e.g. cancer and HIV/AIDS).



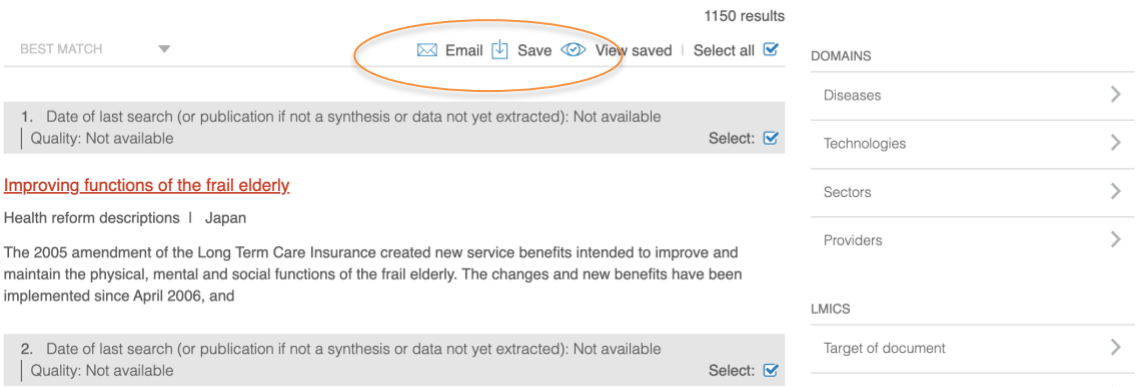
Register for a free account

For users who create an account and log in to use Health Systems Evidence, several advanced features are also available, including the ability to:

- access more than 20 search results
- save documents of interest to a personal clipboard for future reference
- save searches that are found to be the most useful for finding relevant documents
- subscribe to saved searches (and searches curated by the Health Systems Evidence team) in order to receive monthly updates via email of new evidence that addresses these same topics.

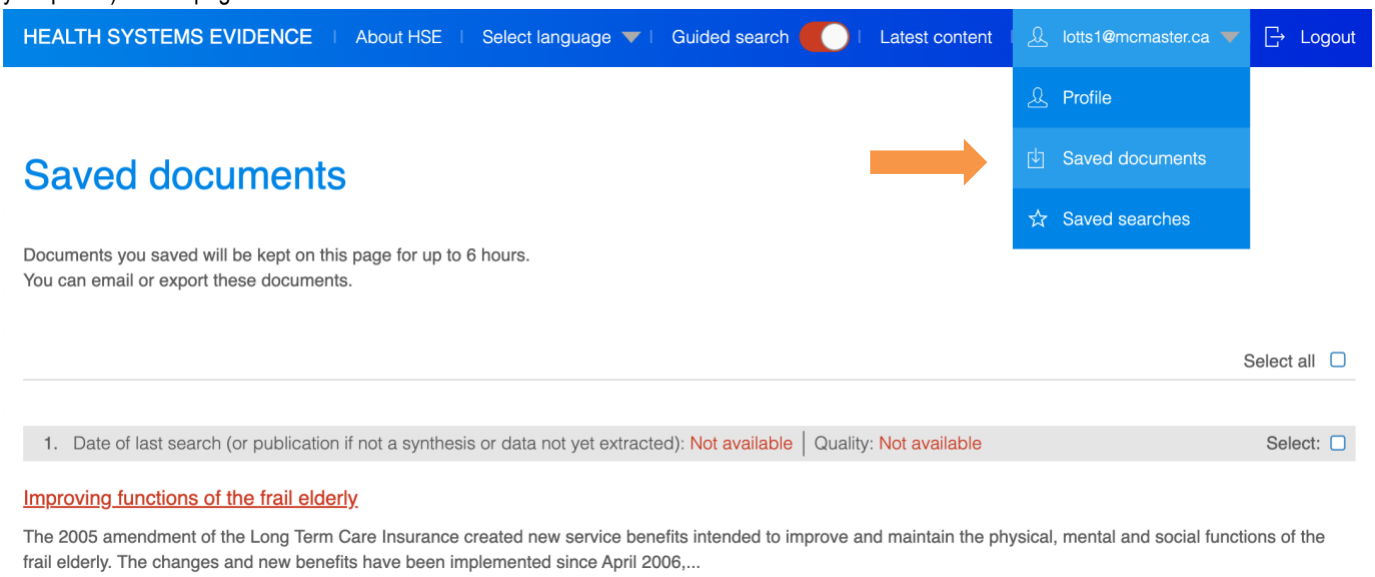
Email and/or save selected documents (when logged in)

Send the list of documents selected from your search results by email to yourself or others, and/or save the list of documents selected from your search results directly to your personal 'saved documents' clipboard.



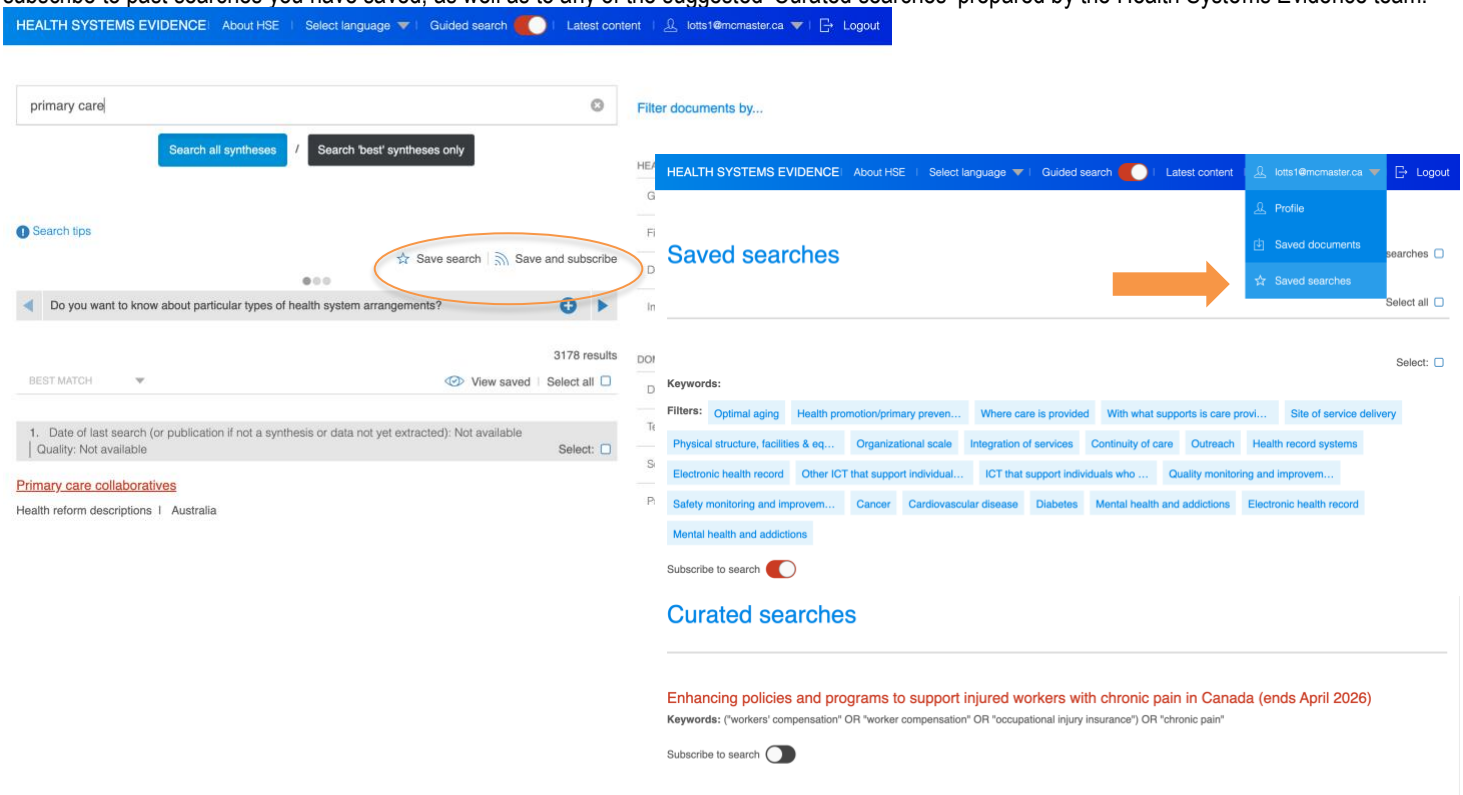
View saved documents (when logged in)

View the list of documents you have saved from previous searches. Your saved documents can also be managed (i.e., retained on or deleted from your profile) on this page.



Save and subscribe to your favourite searches (when logged in)

Save your search strategy and subscribe to receive a monthly email containing links to any documents that have been newly added to Health Systems Evidence and meet your search parameters. Your subscriptions can be managed on the 'Saved searches' page, where you can also subscribe to past searches you have saved, as well as to any of the suggested 'Curated searches' prepared by the Health Systems Evidence team.



For more information, please email hse@mcmaster.ca.

Lavis JN. Health Systems Evidence: Summary of key features and functions. Hamilton, Canada: McMaster Health Forum, 2017.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.

Last updated on 10 February 2026