

# **Evidence-Informed Policy in Practice: Overcoming Barriers to Evaluation Use**

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# Land Acknowledgement



# Evidence-Informed Policymaking

“ Evidence-informed policy making can be defined as a process whereby multiple sources of information, including statistics, data and including the best available research evidence and evaluations, are consulted before making a decision to plan, implement, and (where relevant) alter public policies, programs and deliver quality public services. ”

(OECD, 2020, p.12)



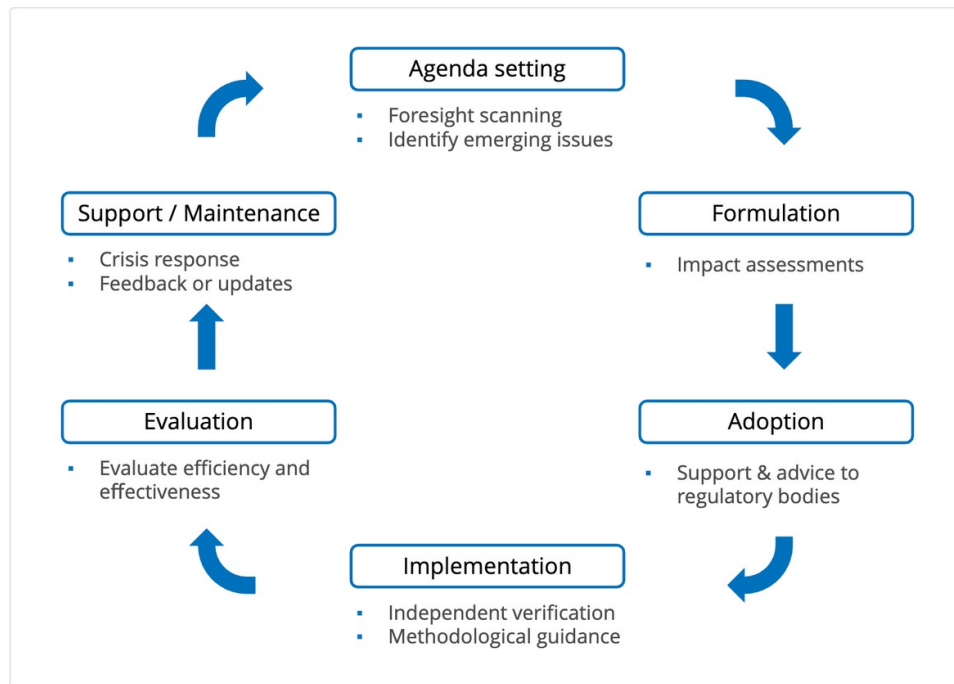
# What do we consider to be evidence?

"statistics, data and...the best available research evidence and evaluations"

(OECD)



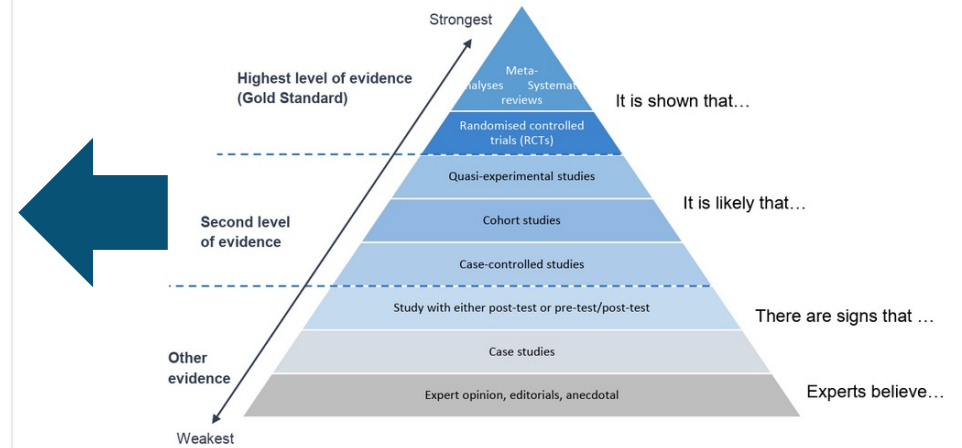
# How evidence feeds into policy



[Cairney, 2013](#)

## Different types of evidence can inform one or several steps in the cycle

Figure 1. Evidence Hierarchy



Source: [www.facs.nsw.gov.au](http://www.facs.nsw.gov.au)

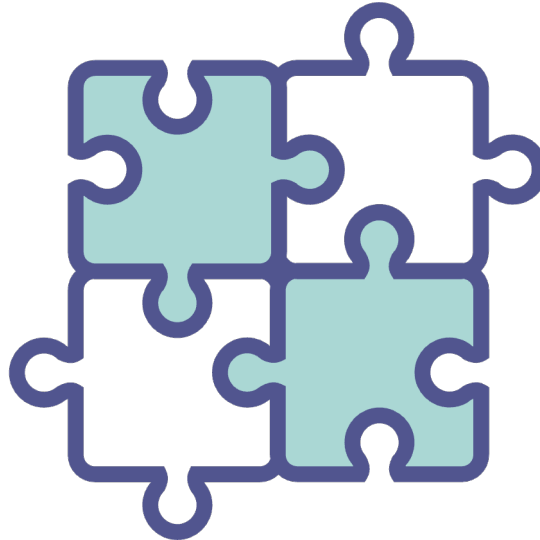
# Why use evidence?

## Support decision-making

Inform government about the effectiveness of policy instruments and measures and support allocation of public funds

## Improve foresight and planning

Identify policy outcomes or effects that might be substantial if applied at scale



## Enhance democratic systems

Enhance transparency and accountability of governments to ensure more democratic systems

## Assess needs and context

Counter political pressures, trends or fads by providing context and a more complete view of an issue

# **Demand Side: Policymakers**

# Individual challenges or barriers to evidence use



Lack of time and/or resources to seek out and review evidence



Personal values and beliefs about the utility of evidence or its applicability to political realities



Limited access to scientific research and/or evidence



Information or evidence overload



Lack of competencies/ experience related to research methods and on integrating evidence in policymaking



Conflict between evidence and policymaker beliefs or ideology

# The Two-Community Theory: Myth or Reality?



Theory: evidence producers and evidence users have different training, priorities, and goals

This has been dispelled through research on evidence use

However, bridging the two communities requires capacity building on both sides and the development of relationships through collaboration

This requires leadership and policy champions in evidence-producing and government organizations

# Organizational challenges or barriers to evidence use



Lack of structures and systems that support evidence use throughout the policy cycle



Insufficient policy staff responsible for assessing and integrating evidence



Poor managerial or leadership support



Unclear decision-making processes



Limited structured engagement between evidence producers and policymakers



Competing values within the organization that cause "policy paralysis"

# Characteristics of the policymaking process that hinder evidence use

- Political nature of the process can result in selective or symbolic uses of evidence
- Process often requires negotiation or compromises that are not based on evidence
- Evidence does not provide clear-cut or unidimensional answers to complex policy questions
- Evidence production timelines do not align with policymaking
- Policy actors work in silos depending on the step of the cycle

# Building policy analytical capacity in individuals: learning from ECB



## Individual evaluation capacity building

Focuses on strengthening individual evaluation competencies to support evaluation conduct (i.e., doing evaluations) and evaluation utilization

This requires enhanced individual training in evaluation design, conduct, and utilization



## Policy analytical capacity

Sufficient policy staff with analytical competencies

Refers to capacity to produce evidence AND capacity to use evidence

This requires enhanced individual training in data collection, knowledge mobilization and policy design

# Strengthening organizational systems and structures: learning from ECB



## Organizational evaluation capacity building

Focuses on strengthening the systems and structures that support the production and use of evaluations

This can include data repositories, decision-making pathways, evaluation policies, formal relationships between units, etc.



## Organizational policy capacity

Focuses on strengthening the systems and structures that support the design and implementation of evidence-based policies

This can include formal relationships with researchers, evidence repositories, connections between policy actors, formal evidence integration processes, etc.

**Supply Side:  
Evidence Producers**

# Factors that affect the likelihood of research use



## Researcher characteristics

- Researcher intentions
- Researcher productivity
- Researcher attributes
- Researcher-practitioner communications



## Research dissemination characteristics

- Communications mechanism (e.g., journal publication, website, workshops)
- Research publication nature and type (i.e., accessibility, applicability)

(Bozeman et al., 2025)

# Producing useful evidence



Reliable, transparent, methodologically sound evidence production processes



Adapting evidence to policymaker needs and using quality communications mechanisms



Engagement of interest holders and communities to foster mutual understanding through the evidence production process

# **Bringing Demand and Supply Together**

# Examples of evidence use in the Canadian federal government

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Qualitative documentation of the experiences of residential school Survivors, their families, and their communities to inform federal policies, programs, and actions (e.g., legislative changes, program investments)
- Covid-19 response: Crisis context meant that “traditional” evidence sources were unavailable; officials used observational studies, predictive models, preprints, expert opinions and community-generated data to inform ongoing guidance and public health measures ([Cotton et al., 2025](#))

# Concrete steps for evidence-informed policymaking in the Canadian federal government



Developing core competencies related to finding, accessing, and integrating evidence in the policy cycle



Breaking down policy and evaluation silos that currently exist in departments and agencies by integrating policy-level evaluation with existing program evaluation frameworks



Creating opportunities for co-production to enhance knowledge transfer from research to policy and vice versa

# Thank you

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