

# Accessing evidence

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**UJ-BCURE**



# How is this relevant to you?

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USE THIS SLIDE TO PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF THE RELEVANCE OF EVIDENCE-INFORMED DECISION-MAKING TO YOUR AUDIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THIS SPECIFIC WORKSHOP

NOTE THAT THERE IS AN ACCOMPANYING HANDOUT LISTING USEFUL SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

# Introduction to BCURE

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- BCURE = Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence
- A three year programme of work funded by UK's Department of International Development (DFID)
- Focuses on increasing the use of research in decision-making through capacity-building
- Investment is mostly in the decision-makers
- Focus is on supporting governments through civil society capacity building rather than research

# Exercise: What is evidence?

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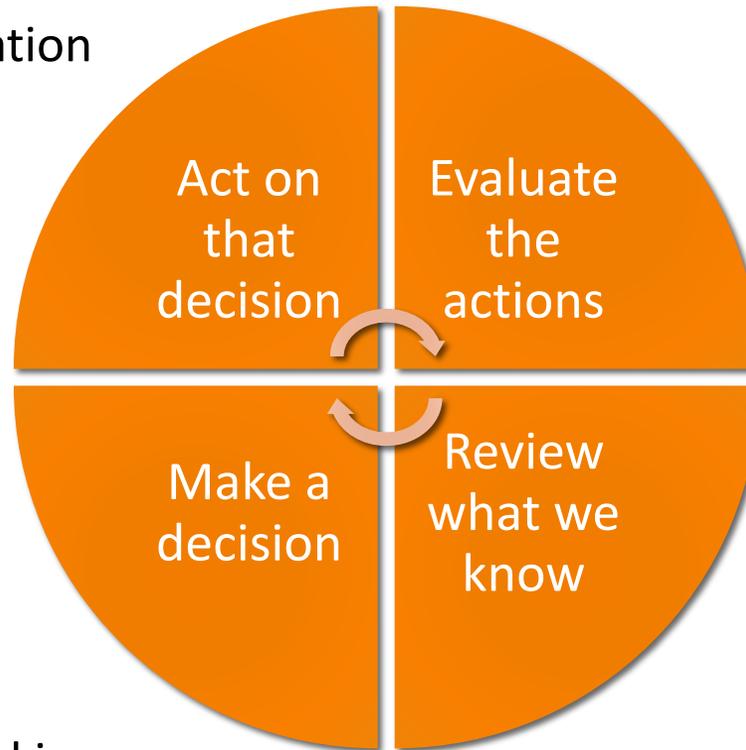
- Participant sharing – What is evidence in your world?
  - Each participant shares with their neighbour what they understand by evidence (could be data, information, numbers, policies, qualitative, quantitative, etc.)
  - A handful of participants are asked to share with the wider group (continue until a wide variety has been shared)
- Trainers sharing – What is evidence in our world?
  - We also have different backgrounds
  - Rigorous research evidence such as systematic reviews
  - First finding, appraising, and using what has been done before commissioning new research
  - Using the best, rigorously applied methods to address the question

# A cycle of Evidence-Informed Decision-Making (EIDM)

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- Implementation / action

- Monitoring, evaluation, and research

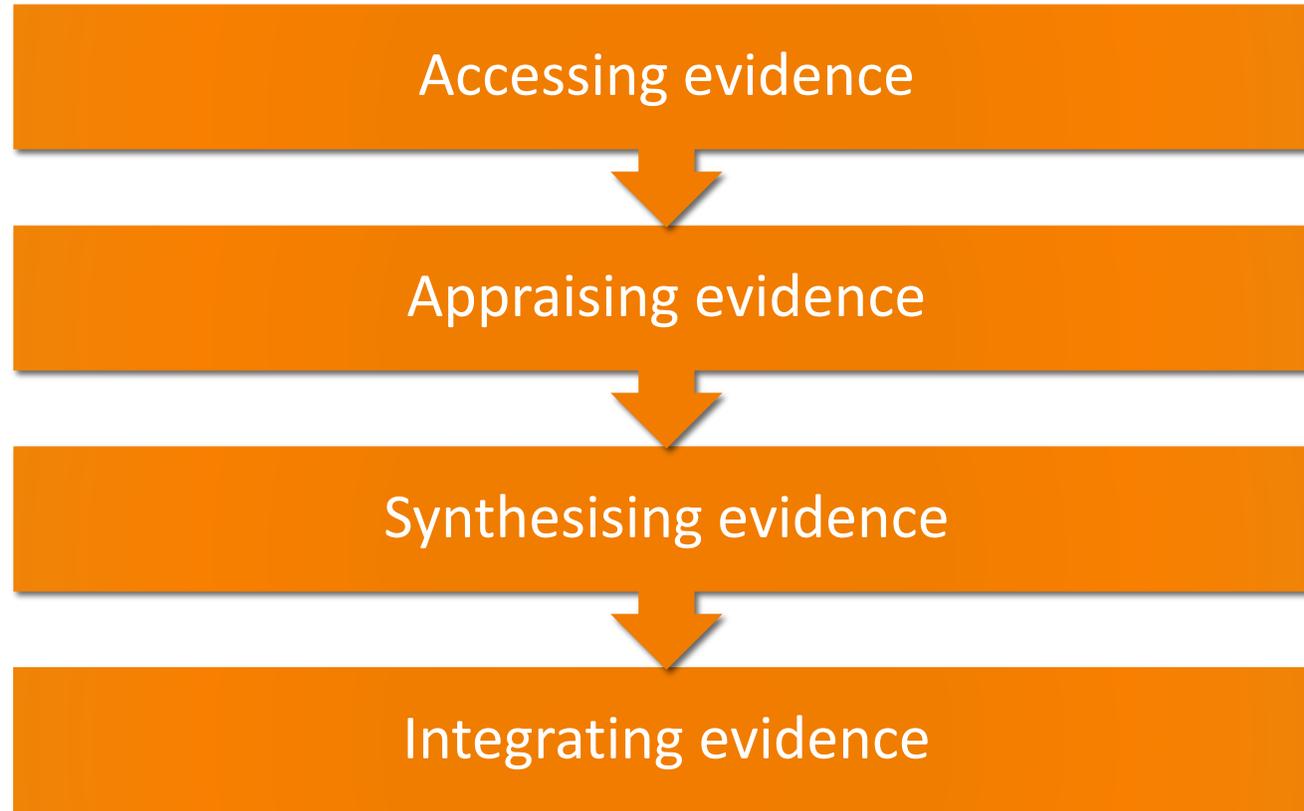


- Evidence-informed decision-making

- Reviewing the evidence

# Steps towards EIDM

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# What is EIDM?

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- EIDM is the process of “distilling and disseminating the best available evidence from research, practice and experience and using that evidence to inform and improve (public health) policy and practice” (NCCPH, 2011)
- A process involving: posing specific questions, searching for current best evidence, evaluating the evidence objectively, and taking action informed by the evidence
- Developed out of evidence-based medicine
- Acknowledges the importance of professional expertise and context
- Decisions are *informed* by evidence and a wide range of other factors; not *dictated* by evidence
- Transparency is key
- Evidence is defined broadly

# EIDM is no good without the evidence

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- There are a number of assumptions within the evidence-informed decision-making model, namely that the evidence:
  - Exists
  - Is accessible
  - Is relevant and reliable
  - Can be usefully synthesised and integrated into decisions
- This module aims to give you the knowledge you need to increase your chances of accessing the available evidence

# Accessing relevant evidence is a technical and practical skill

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- You need:
  - To understand what evidence you need and where to find it
  - To know how to search for it and retrieve it
  - Good internet access, a computer, and a printer
  - To be relatively comfortable using computers and have fairly good technical abilities
- If any of the above are problematic, you need to ask an expert to help you

# Key steps in designing a search

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- Be clear about what you need
- Decide where you are going to look for evidence
- Establish how you are going to do your search
  - This usually involves varying levels of technical electronic searching
- Ask for help

# Be clear about what is needed

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- Identify what question(s) you need to answer
- Clarify the scope of the information you are seeking
- Set your 'inclusion criteria'

**Optional activity:** work with your facilitator to identify a question, set its scope and determine your inclusion criteria

# Decide where to look for evidence

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- Discussion: Where do you currently look for evidence?
- Some answers may include:
  - Records office
  - Library
  - Official records within your department e.g. monitoring data
  - Searching online research databases
  - Going through your or a colleague's bookshelf
  - Asking an expert
- Check that no-one has already done your search for you
  - Ask others who are working on the same topic
  - Look for systematic reviews (more on this in the next slide)

# What systematic reviews are and why they help

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- Systematic reviews are rigorous literature reviews addressing particular topics which have already collated much of the relevant research evidence on specific questions
- There may not be a review which answers your question(s), but it is worth taking 30 minutes to check the main online libraries of systematic reviews in case someone has already done your searches for you
- See the handout of useful sources of evidence for links to the main systematic review databases

# Establishing a search strategy

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- Ask others
  - Use email and the phone
  - Is there a formal way to request information within your department?
  - Talk to your research, evaluation, or monitoring unit
- Search online
  - There are a wide range of online search databases
  - Many specialise in particular fields
  - Some are free, others charge
  - See our list of useful sources

# Designing a search string for searching electronic databases

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- Electronic databases contain large amounts of research but unless you know how to search for it, you can end up missing relevant evidence
- You need to understand how to use Boolean terms (AND/OR/NOT)
- It is important to identify all the words which might be used to describe the concepts you are searching for
- You can also use structured search terms within the database
- Using a question proposed by the group, your trainer will demonstrate the process of developing the search string

# Managing search hits and applying inclusion criteria

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- Your searching may have collated large numbers of search hits; sometimes many thousands of suggested articles or reports
- Quickly and systematically process what you have found by revisiting your inclusion criteria
  - Screen your search hits by applying your inclusion criteria to decide if each piece of evidence is on the 'in', 'out', or 'maybe' pile
- Have some simple categories which you can then apply to your 'in' pile to help you begin to make sense of them
  - Country the evidence comes from
  - The question it addresses
  - Describing the problem; proposing solutions; evaluating solutions; reporting on the cost of proposed solutions; reporting on the acceptability of a policy or programme, etc.
  - Whether the evidence is internal or external

# Asking for help

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- Tips and tricks for accessing information
  - Check no-one has done this search before
  - Look for relevant systematic reviews
  - Ask for technical support internally
  - If you have time, consider commissioning someone to do a thorough search and access the relevant evidence for you
  - If accessing evidence is key to your work, consider getting more training and support on how to do this (we can provide additional advice)

# Contact details

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# Useful Resources

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- INASP (the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications) has a number of resources and programmes to facilitate access to evidence
  - See <http://www.inasp.info/>
- The EPPI-Centre (Evidence for Policy and Practice Information-Centre) has guidelines for systematic reviews which provide details on how to conduct full systematic searches for evidence
  - Follow links to 'Methods and Tools' on the EPPI-Centre website <http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/>

# References

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1. Graphic from Gough, D. and Thomas, J. 2012. Chapter 3: Commonality and diversity in reviews. In: Gough, D., Oliver, S. and Thomas, J. (eds) *An introduction to Systematic Reviews*. London: Sage.
2. NCCPH (National Collaborating Centre for Public Health). 2011. Factsheet. [http://www.nccph.ca/docs/EIPH\\_Factsheet\\_EN.pdf](http://www.nccph.ca/docs/EIPH_Factsheet_EN.pdf)

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