SUCCESS STORY

Beyond making evidence available

Supporting global priority-setting on evidence-informed policymaking

Overview

The Art and Science of Promoting Evidence-Informed Policymaking: A Global Living Evidence Map provides a structured overview of evidence on how to strengthen the use of evidence in policymaking. As evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) continues to grow, researchers, funders, policymakers and evidence intermediaries need practical tools that show where evidence exists, where gaps remain, and where future research investment could be most useful. The November 2026 update of the map includes 1,010 studies. The earlier May 2026 update, which included 984 studies, contributed to the World Health Organization's global research priority-setting initiative on knowledge translation and evidence-informed policymaking.

One application of the evidence map has been its contribution to the development of the World Health Organization (WHO) Global Research Agenda on Knowledge Translation and Evidence-informed Policymaking. The Global Research Agenda identified 19 priority research areas for the field and aims to promote targeted research investments and reduce research waste. It provides a shared roadmap for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, funders, evidence intermediaries, institutions and other interest-holders working to strengthen evidence use across sectors.

The need

Developing the WHO Global Research Agenda required navigating a large but dispersed body of work on evidence-informed policymaking, including research on the barriers and facilitators of evidence use, engagement mechanisms, knowledge translation approaches, and interventions designed to strengthen the use of evidence in policymaking. While substantial research already existed, it was spread across sectors and regions, and important gaps remained. A traditional literature review alone was therefore not sufficient. The process needed a structured way to bring existing evidence together, make gaps visible, and provide a common reference point for a broad global consultation.

The contribution of the evidence map

The evidence map contributed to the Global Research Agenda in two main ways. First, it served as one of three evidence inputs into the consultative process, alongside a literature review on previous research priority-setting exercises and a global survey of experts. The map and its findings were shared with more than 130 experts and other stakeholders from all WHO regions at the start of the consultation process, including researchers, practitioners, policymakers, funders and partner organisations. The map also highlighted the need for greater coordination in research commissioning and production on EIDM. These findings helped inform discussions on research priorities and the areas where further research, synthesis and coordination could add value.

Second, the underlying studies included in the evidence map were used to identify future research priorities. The team reviewed the included studies, focusing particularly on sections where authors made recommendations for future research, and extracted around 150 distinct research needs from the evidence base. These were then synthesised alongside the other evidence inputs to develop the initial draft list of 120 research areas that launched the consultative process. In this way, the evidence

map was not only a reference resource, but also a direct input into the foundation of the Global Research Agenda process.

The influence

The evidence map strengthened the WHO Global Research Agenda by providing a structured, transparent evidence base for priority-setting. It contributed to the initial list of research areas, which were later refined through consultation, consolidation and validation into 19 final research areas.

An important finding from the map was the limited research examining whether and how interventions to strengthen evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) lead to changes in policy processes, implementation and development outcomes. Much of the existing evidence focused on intermediate outcomes, such as awareness, motivation and capability, rather than downstream effects.

These gaps were reflected in the final Global Research Agenda, which identified the evaluation of EIPM interventions and their impacts as important research priorities. Although the final priorities emerged through a broader consultative process, the map provided evidence that helped inform and substantiate these areas of focus.

The value and lessons

The evidence map added value by providing a centralised and accessible overview of a complex and growing field. It helped build awareness of the wider evidence base by making visible where evidence sits, where evidence is missing, and how the field is developing over time, regardless of users' prior familiarity with the literature. In the context of the Global Research Agenda, this overview provided a shared reference point for discussions about the state of the evidence and areas requiring further attention.

A key lesson from this experience is that evidence maps are most useful when they are not simply made available, but actively introduced, explained and linked to the decisions or processes they are intended to support. Sharing the map during the consultation process, explaining its structure and providing opportunities for questions helped participants engage with the resource. This illustrates the importance of actively integrating evidence maps into research priority-setting processes rather than relying solely on their availability.

Looking ahead

The living evidence map could continue to support the Global Research Agenda by monitoring how new research develops against the priority areas identified. This could help show whether previously identified gaps are being addressed over time and where further investment remains needed. The case demonstrates how an evidence map can move beyond being a static repository to become a practical tool for global priority-setting, consensus-building and future research planning.

About PACE

The Pan-African Collective for Evidence (PACE) is a non-profit organisation that supports evidence-informed policymaking across Africa. Its vision is a world free of poverty. PACE works to unlock the potential of evidence capacities, evidence communities, and evidence synthesis to strengthen institutionalised evidence-to-policy systems and support meaningful development and transformation. For more information: https://pace-evidence.org/art-and-science

About this success story

This success story is part of a series showcasing how policymakers can use the Global Living Evidence Map on Evidence-Informed Policymaking (EIPM).

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