



Evidence – Systematic and Rapid Reviews

[Evidence – Dissemination plan](#)

What are systematic and rapid reviews?

Systematic reviews aim to summarize literature and synthesize the results of multiple studies and thus concretise the knowledge created through research within a specific topic. **Rapid reviews** aim to synthesise and provide relevant evidence in a rapid (as the name suggests) and cost-effective manner. In short, rapid reviews are accelerated systematic reviews to produce actionable evidence in a shorter amount of time.

Why is it so important?

There is an increasing demand for relevant, contextualized research evidence to strengthen health policy and systems. Managing the bulk of research out there and making sense of the readiness level of evidence is a crucial starting point. The overall objectives of systematic and rapid reviews are to ensure that health providers can be confident that the treatments and practices used are based on the best possible knowledge, which is independently assessed, and quality checked. You can think of it like this, most empirical questions have extensive literature and systematically reviewing the research findings is a way to compress and make sense of the results. In some circumstances, there is value in speeding up the review process and fast-tracking knowledge synthesis for pressing action needs. This is where rapid reviews come in as they can provide strategic evidence that facilitate decisions about health responses in times of urgency and/or crisis.

Reviewing research findings and summarising evidence can however be a complex process due to a multitude of factors such as, for example:

- The sheer volume of research evidence currently produced
- The access to research evidence
- The time it takes to read and the skills to appraise what evidence to use
- Understanding and applying the research evidence in practice

- Research findings/results can be conflicting and do not always provide the clarity that policy makers need
- Research that is not aligned with or informed by policy and action (therefore is not relevant to decision making)
- Unactionable research findings
- Poor timing and timeliness of research or its findings

How do we get there?

Thankfully there are numerous resources available on how to go about conducting reviews. Below are some shortlisted tools that explain in a coherent manner how systematic and rapid reviews are conducted. As an additional tip, the “cheat sheets” on this [site](#) can be of assistance to understanding the basics to judge the quality of studies, the significance of data, or the importance of new findings.

🔗 **TOOL: [Synthesi.SR](#)**

By: [Knowledge Translation Program](#)

A comprehensive and user-friendly web-based toolkit that can help streamline the systematic review process. The knowledge translation program site also has several useful steps and guides related to dissemination and implementation, so we do recommend spending some time navigating this site.

🔗 **TOOL: [Rapid Review Guide](#)**

By: [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

A long and comprehensive document (142 pages so this is for the ambitious ones!) providing guidance on how to plan, conduct, and promote the use of rapid reviews to strengthen health policy and system. Different approaches and methods are introduced.

🔗 **TOOL: [Cochrane handbook for systematic reviews of interventions](#)**

By: Cochrane

This handbook provides the core methodology for undertaking systematic reviews on the effects of health interventions, important considerations relating to populations, outcomes and economy, and approaches to collecting and synthesizing evidence.

📄 **TOOL: GRADE**

By: BMJ Best Practices

This is a grading tool - a step after the systematic or rapid review. GRADE is a transparent framework for developing and presenting summaries of evidence and provides a systematic approach for making clinical practice recommendations. It is a widely adopted tool for grading the quality of evidence and for making recommendations.