



## **Evidence Commission update 2023**

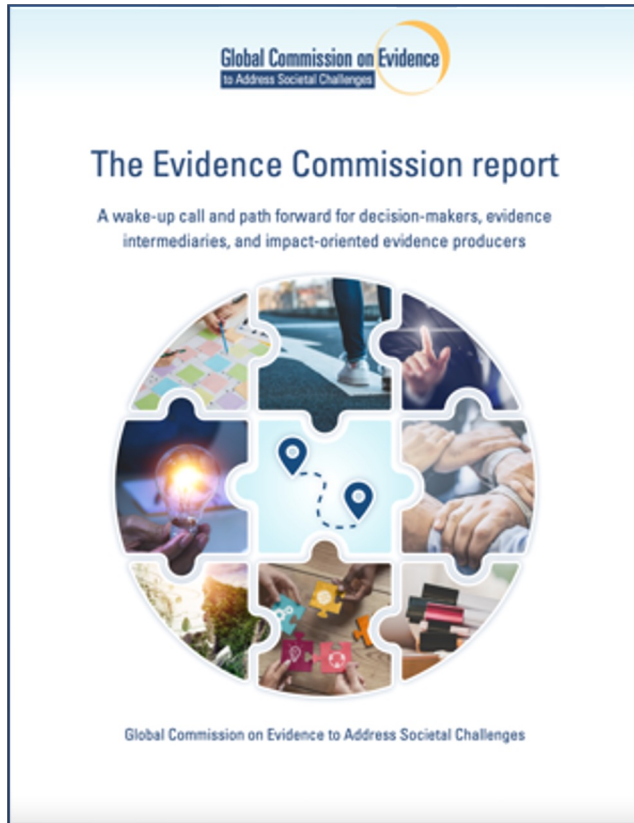
Strengthening domestic evidence-support systems,  
enhancing the global evidence architecture, and  
putting evidence at the centre of everyday life

30 January 2023

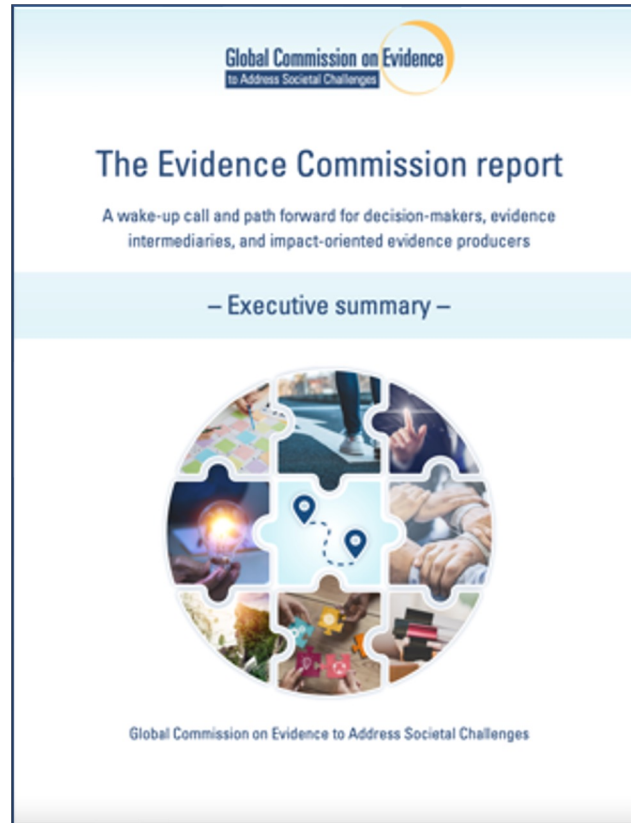
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Report



Executive summary



\* Update



One year since the publication of the report (which is now available in seven language and in multiple formats)

- While government policymakers in some countries (like newly elected ones in some Latin American countries) are open to new approaches to decision-making and evidence use, many policymakers, organizational leaders and professionals have largely returned to pre-pandemic approaches
- While some funders and donors and some impact-oriented evidence producers have piloted coordination mechanisms, many evidence producers continue to operate without coordination and to generate significant research waste
- While many citizens have become more aware of the potential value of evidence, many others have become more distrustful of decision-makers and evidence

This (first) annual update is focused on three implementation priorities

- Agreed in partnership with the producers of the two other global reports published on this topic in the last 18 months (Cochrane Convenes and the Global Evidence-to-Policy Summit)
- Being addressed with the support of the Evidence Commission Implementation Council and three other groups (**appendix 1**)
- Collectively cover 20 of the Evidence Commission's 24 recommendations and do so as a more actionable package (**appendix 2**)



Formalize and strengthen domestic evidence-support systems



Enhance and leverage the global evidence architecture



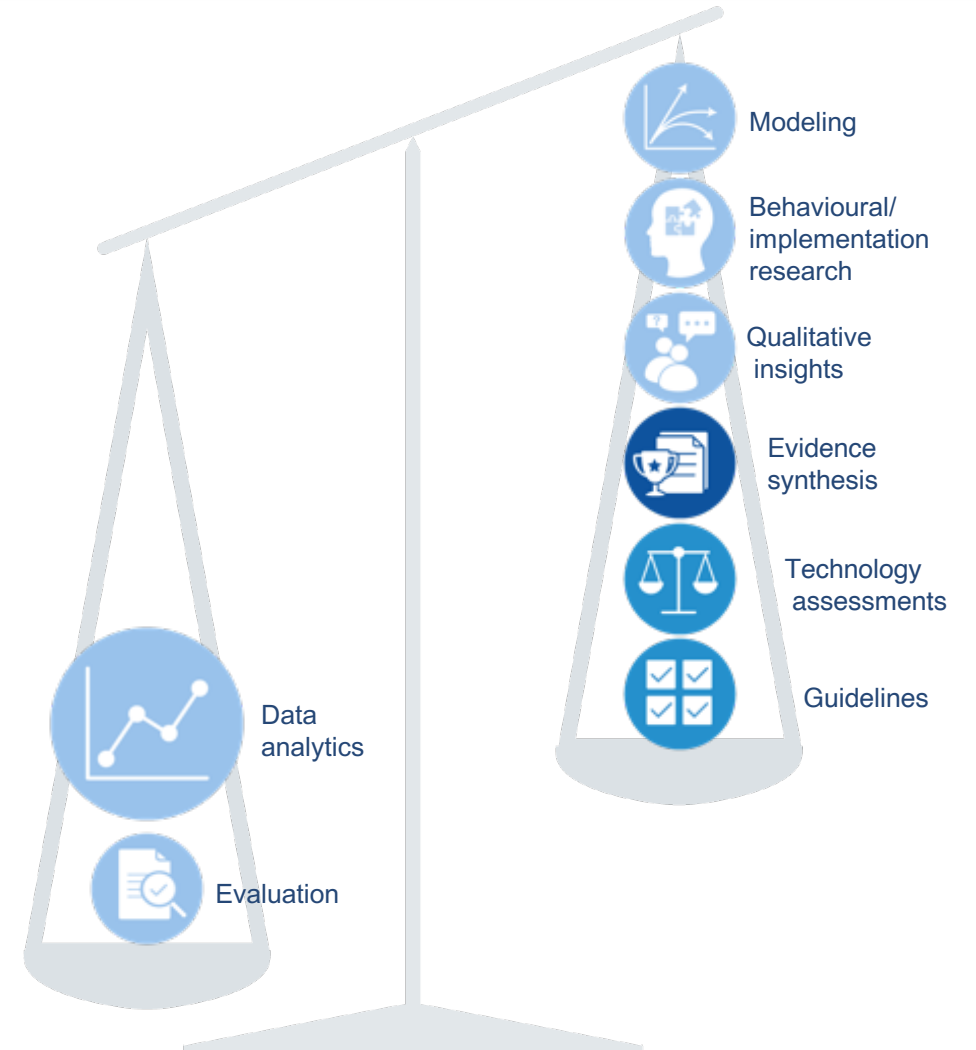
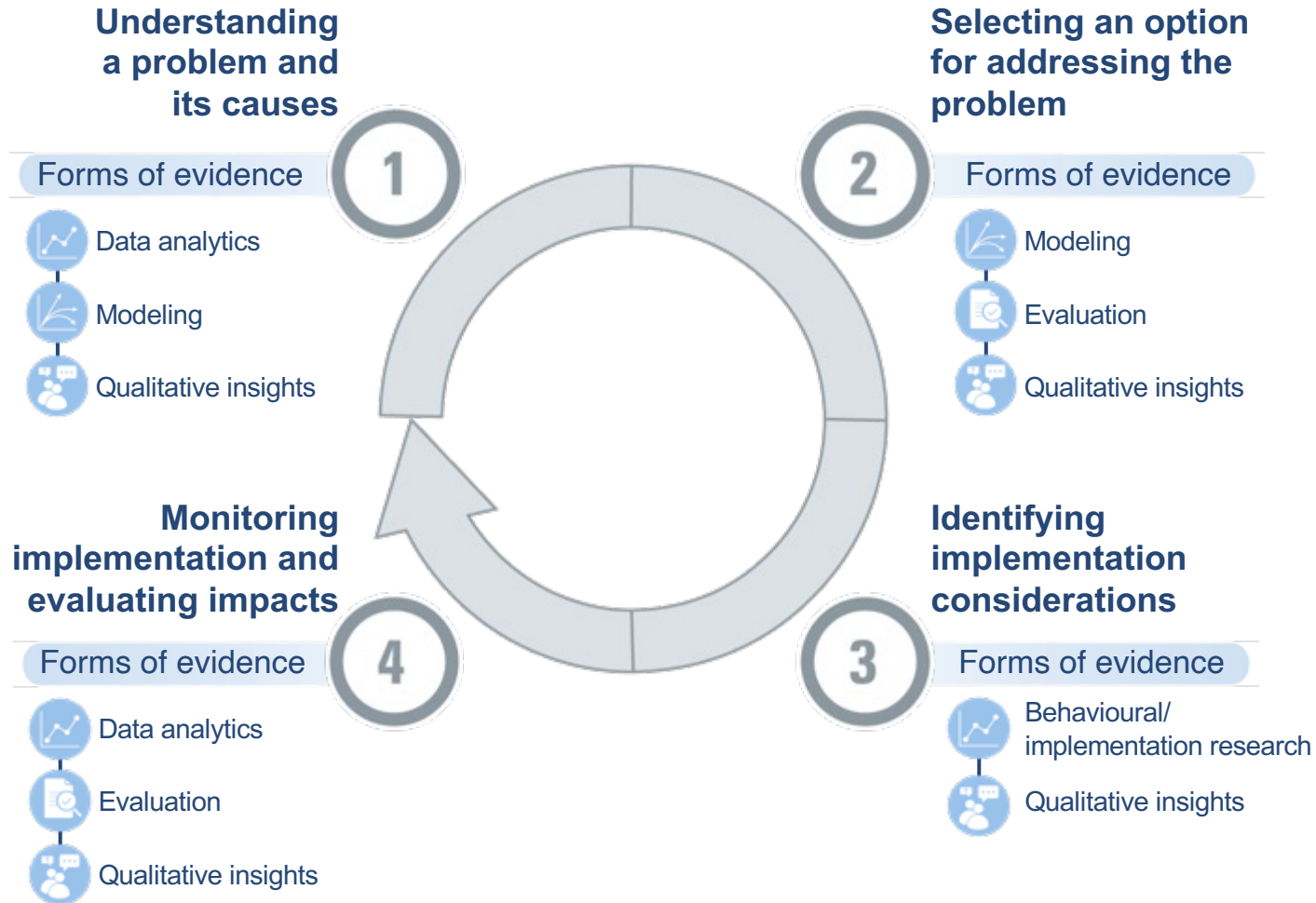
Put evidence at the centre of everyday life

Underpinning these three priorities is the growing recognition of how evidence can be used to address societal challenges (as well as about the many other steps needed to support citizens)

- Respond to decision-makers' questions with the right mix of forms of evidence (versus select forms of evidence) → **slides 6 and 7**
  - Match the forms of domestic evidence to the right step in the decision-making process
  - Combine domestic evidence (what has been learned in our country) and global evidence (what has been learned from around the world, including how it varies by groups and contexts), the latter of which is enabled by the global evidence architecture (e.g., Campbell and Cochrane)
- Embed evidence in cycles of rapid learning and improvement → **slide 8**
- Use 'best evidence' (versus 'other things') → **slide 9**







# Respond to decision-makers' questions with the right mix of forms of evidence (versus select forms of evidence that get a lot of attention now)



## 1) Match the forms of domestic evidence to the right step in the decision-making process






# Respond with the right mix of forms of evidence

- 1) **Match** the form of domestic evidence to the right step in the decision-making process
- 2) **Combine domestic evidence** (what has been learned in our country) **and global evidence** (what has been learned from around the world, including how it varies by groups and contexts)

Vantage point	Forms of evidence	Steps where it adds the greatest value			
Domestic evidence 	 Data analytics	①			④
	 Modeling	①	②		
	 Evaluation		②		④
	 Behavioural/implementation research			③	
	 Qualitative insights	①	②	③	④

Vantage point	Forms of evidence
Global evidence 	 Evidence synthesis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An evidence synthesis:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• systematically and transparently identifies, selects, assesses and synthesizes the evidence addressing a specific question</li> <li>• includes explicit quality assessments (and doesn't accept a journal's peer review as synonymous with quality) and can itself be assessed for quality (and quality ratings are included in many evidence-synthesis databases like Social Systems Evidence)</li> <li>• can address any question and synthesize any type of evidence</li> <li>• can also describe how much certainty we have about particular findings</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

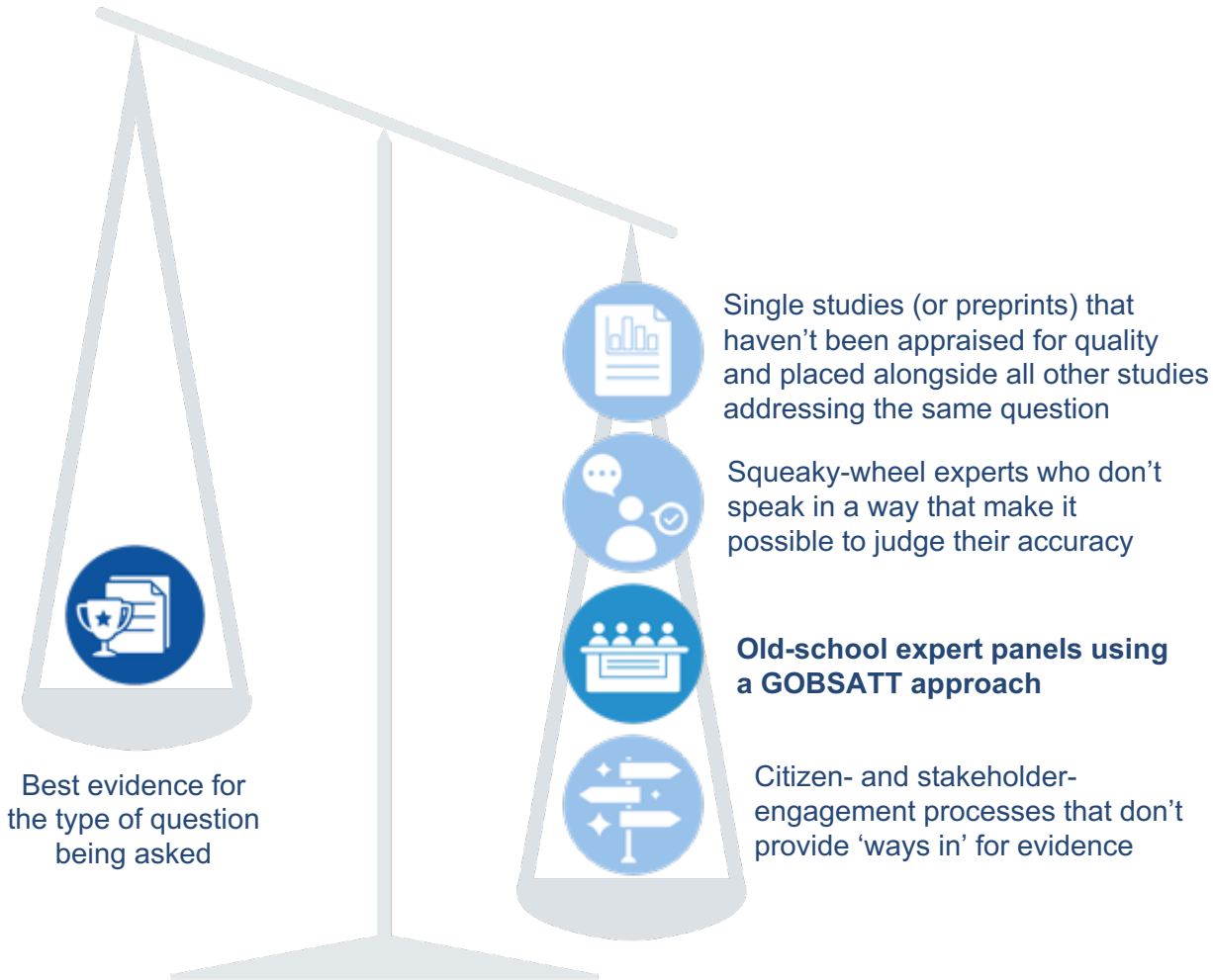
Vantage point	Forms of evidence
Domestic recommendations or evidence support informed by domestic and global evidence 	 Technology assessment/cost-effectiveness analysis   Guideline

# Another way of approaching the use of evidence: Embed evidence in cycles of rapid learning and improvement

(e.g., for climate adaptation, education and health)



# Use best evidence (vs other things that get a lot of attention now), and the specific example of expert panels



If Australia can go for the gold with its national health guidelines, why can't we do it in our country and for other sectors?

## Gold

Expert panels that:

- 1) convene people with the right mix of issue-specific knowledge, evidence-appraisal expertise, and lived experience
- 2) follow rigorous processes to develop their recommendations (e.g., pre-circulate evidence summaries and clarify what evidence and experiences underpin the recommendations)
- 3) adjust their recommendations as the context, issues and evidence evolve (in the case of living expert panels)

## Will never make it to the podium

Expert panels using a GOBSATT (good old boys sitting around the table) approach

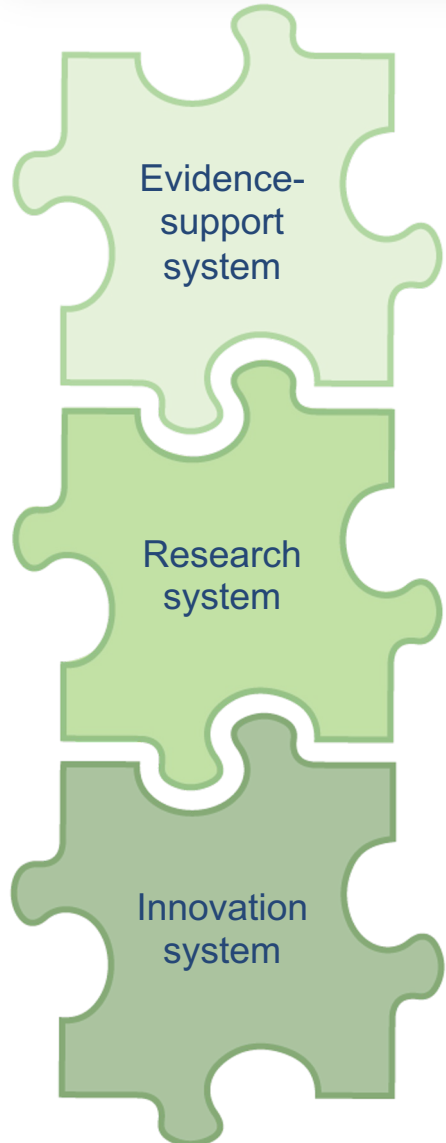


## Formalize and strengthen domestic evidence-support systems

- The first of three implementation priorities provides the mechanisms for on-the-ground impacts with the second priority and it can underpin many of the mechanisms with the third priority
- The Evidence Commission secretariat and its partners in 12 countries are conducting rapid evidence-support system assessments, or RESSAs, and sharing lessons learned through the RESSA Country Team Leads Group
  - Goal in each country is to identify what's going well that needs to be systematized and scaled up, and what gaps should be prioritized to fill, and to work with government policymakers, organizational leaders, professionals and citizens to push for improvements



# Conducting a RESSA starts with a solid understanding of what a domestic evidence-support system is, and how it differs from research and innovation systems



An **evidence-support system** includes many types of infrastructure

- Structures and processes on the **evidence-demand side** to:
  - incorporate evidence use into routine advisory and decision-making processes (e.g., ministerial briefings, cabinet submissions, budget proposals, spending plans)
  - build and sustain an evidence culture (e.g., requirements for transparency in evidence inputs)
  - strengthen capacity for evidence use (as well as broader policy and program capacity) among policy and program staff, government science advisors, and those supporting expert panels and citizen- and stakeholder-engagement processes
- Coordination mechanisms at the **interface between the evidence demand and supply sides** to:
  - elicit and prioritize the evidence needs decision-makers and their advisors
  - package evidence from multiple sources into inputs that align with the requirements of advisory and decision-making processes
- Evidence-support units (in-house or within partner organizations) on the **evidence-supply side** that:
  - understand the domestic context, evidence standards, and decision-makers' preferred communication formats
  - are timely and demand-driven
  - focus on contextualizing the stock of existing evidence – both domestic evidence (in its many forms) and global evidence – for a given decision in an equity-sensitive way (and can also contribute to the flow of future evidence)

The **research system** tends to focus on creating generalizable knowledge and to measure success with peer-reviewed grants and publications (although this is beginning to shift as a result of the Declaration on Research Assessment)

The **innovation system** tends to focus on commercializing products and processes and to measure success with revenues

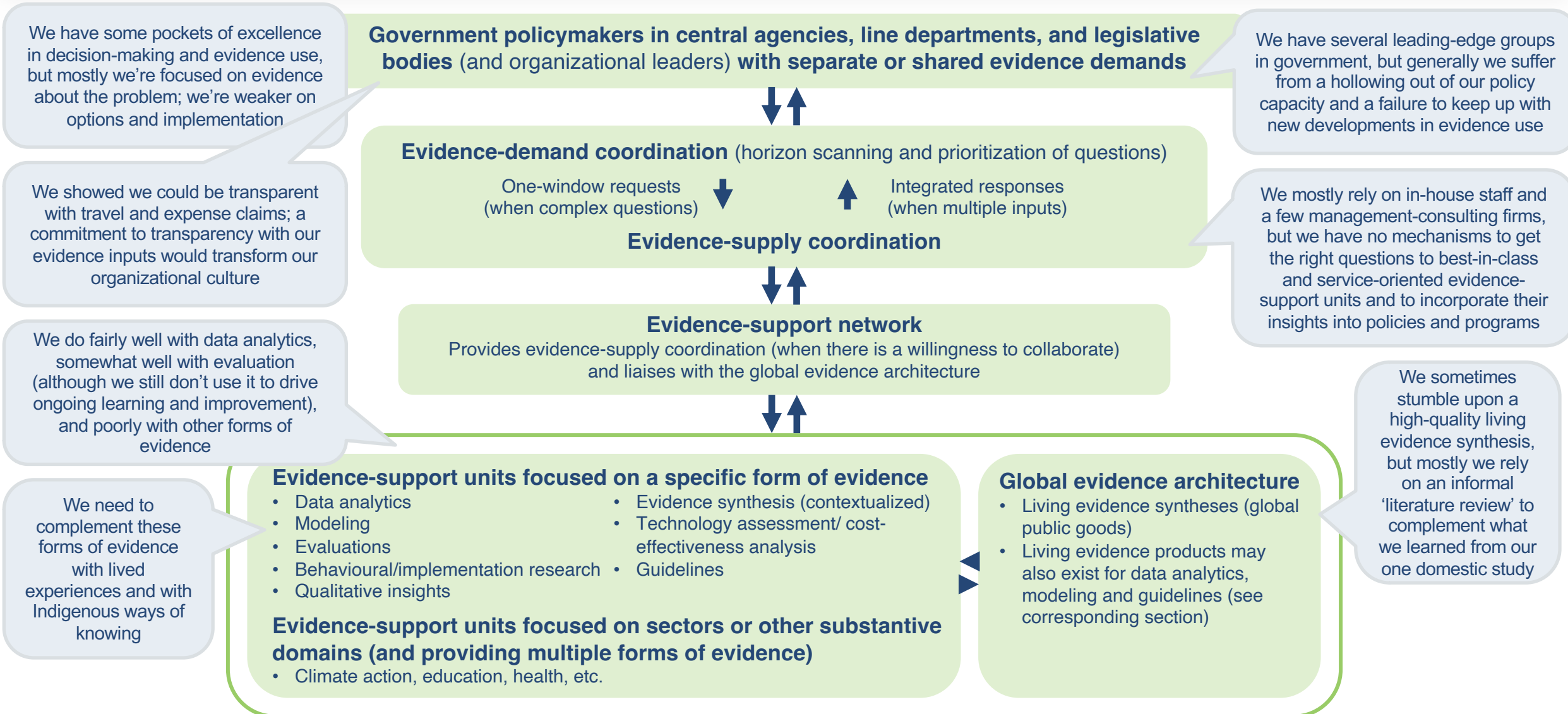
# Conducting a RESSA involves asking questions about each of the potential features of an evidence-support system – as a ‘baseline’ – and taking action based on what is learned

Drawing on websites, documents and interviews, ask what’s going well that needs to be systematized and scaled up and what gaps should be prioritized to fill

- For each agency, department or body on the evidence-demand side
  - What types of decisions are made and what does this mean for the types of evidence needed?
  - What sources of ‘evidence’ are currently drawn upon (e.g., domestic data analytics and evaluations, evidence syntheses, and expert panels like the gold medal-earning one on the previous page)?
  - Are the enablers (e.g., explicit standard for evidence use in cabinet submissions), culture and capacity in place?
- For the demand side of any coordination mechanism
  - Are there people who have experience with horizon scanning and with prioritizing and scoping questions in all decision-making steps?
  - Are the questions typically similar to those being asked by other groups and is a mechanism in place to share questions and responses across groups?
  - Are the questions typically complex and do they require the engagement of multiple evidence-support units?
- For the supply side of any coordination mechanism
  - Are there people who can act as ‘general contractors’ and bring in the right ‘trades,’ or forms of evidence, depending on the question?
    - ✓ for changes to policy and system arrangements, these are typically policy and systems researchers
    - ✓ for behaviour changes among professionals and citizens, these are typically behavioural/implementation researchers
  - Is it possible to provide integrated responses that may take the form of one or more of:
    - ✓ evidence scan across all applicable forms of evidence (to capture best evidence)
    - ✓ jurisdictional scan (to learn from the experiences of other countries)
    - ✓ horizon scan (to leverage foresight work done nationally and globally)
    - ✓ key-informant interviews (to leverage rich experiences)
    - ✓ deliberative processes (to engage citizens and stakeholders in collective problem-solving)?
- For the evidence-supply side
  - Are all forms of evidence covered by existing evidence-support units of the type described in the first infographic?

# The potential features of an evidence-support system that we're looking for are in green below...

... and examples of the types of things we're hearing are in comment boxes (in brief, most countries have few features, and ... even fewer working optimally, especially when crises emerge)

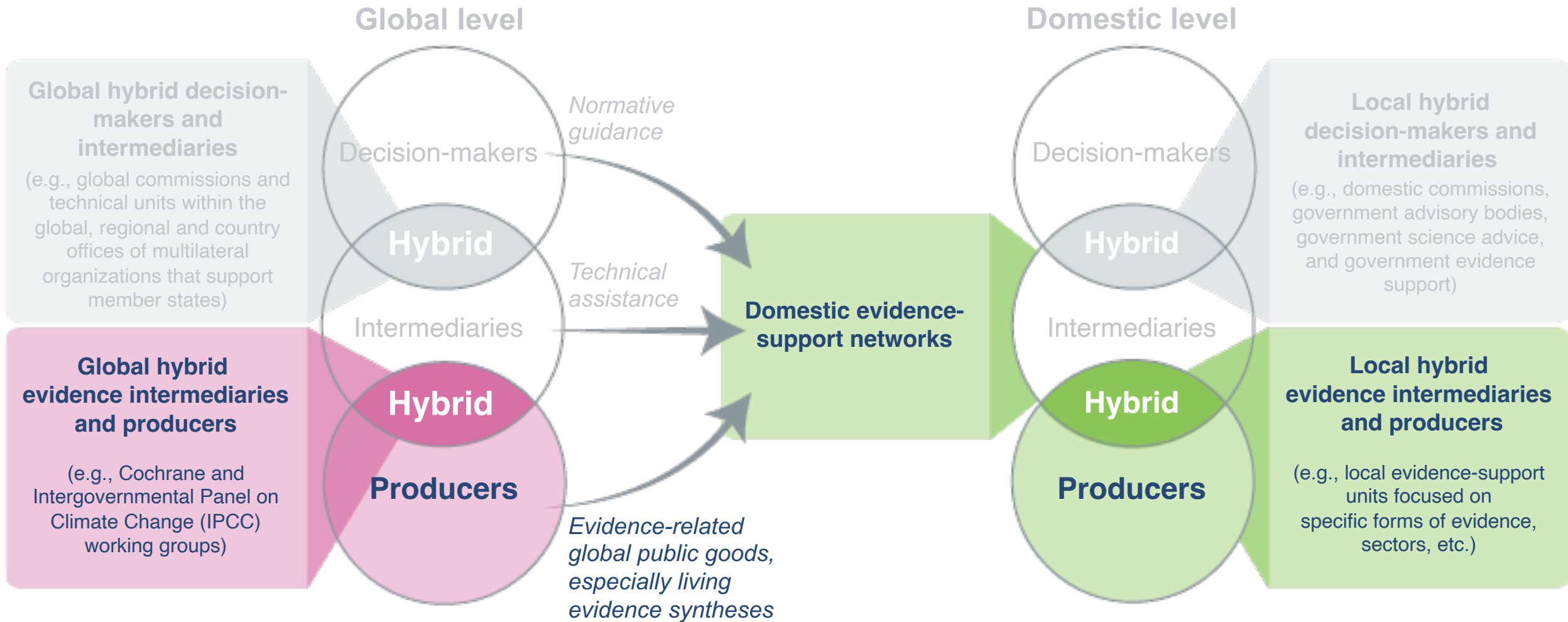




## Enhance and leverage the global evidence architecture

- The second implementation priority is a key enabler of the first priority and of the evidence-informed efforts of multilateral organizations to support their member states
- Ongoing leadership by WHO (e.g., with its normative guidance), and pockets of leadership at UNICEF and UNDP, but little response from other multilateral organizations
- Some pilots but no broad efforts to coordinate the production of evidence-related global public goods
  - Continued low signal-to-noise ratio with uneven coverage, low quality and outdatedness the pattern for both SDG-focused evidence syntheses and COVID-19-focused evidence syntheses, as well as continued duplication and hence research waste
  - Many anecdotal examples of funders/donors and global public good producers ‘going their own way’
- The Evidence Commission secretariat and its partners are speaking with many funders and donors and with many global public good producers (through the Global Evidence Producers Group) and conducting an assessment of past efforts to enhance aspects of the global evidence architecture
  - Goal is to develop one or more viable models and to seek funding and the support of evidence producers to pilot the model and then to scale it up based on lessons learned

# Improving coordination among evidence producers (both global and domestic) is an important place to start



# One possible model for improving coordination: Start by better connecting global and domestic



We were able to respond to a question from national policymakers with a contextualized evidence synthesis on climate-adaptation strategies in three days because a living evidence synthesis was 'sitting there' with more than 17,000 studies already identified and assessed

## Global public-goods producing teams

- Each commits to respond to emerging global priorities in ways that increase coordination and reduce duplication in the production of **living evidence syntheses**
- They collectively commit to work with existing networks and platforms to maximize efficiencies and synergies and to strengthen and implement standards (for a fuller list, see the footnote on the preceding page)
  - Networks of producers of global public goods (e.g., Campbell, Cochrane, IPCC)
  - Platforms that support the production of global public goods (e.g., PROSPERO)
  - Networks of guideline and technology-assessment groups that use these global public goods
  - **Domestic evidence-support networks** that use these global public goods and that can bring forward the perspectives of many types of decision-makers who use these global public goods (government policymakers, organizational leaders, professionals, and citizens)

## Domestic evidence-support networks

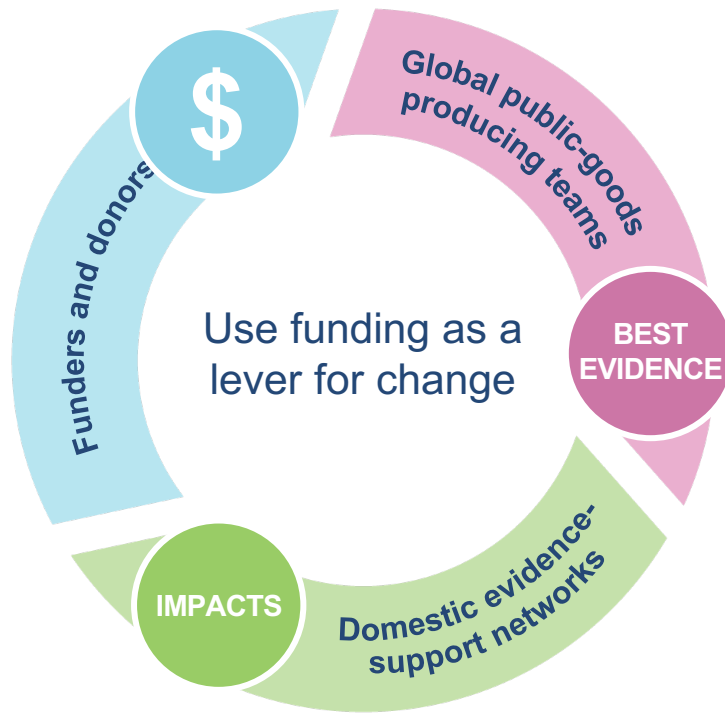
- Each commits to respond to emerging domestic priorities in ways that leverage and enable the implementation of global public goods (e.g., through **contextualized evidence synthesis and support**) and to support the continuous improvement of global public goods (through partnerships with teams in their region or with similar topic coverage)
- They collectively commit to work with existing networks and platforms to maximize efficiencies and synergies and to strengthen and implement standards
  - Networks of evidence-support units (e.g., Brazil Coalition for Evidence, What Works Network in the U.K., EVIPNet in low- and middle-income countries)

The Living Evidence Alliance is a promising prototype, but we have a long way to go with hundreds of low-quality evidence syntheses for unimportant questions and none for many of society's most important questions

Paradoxically, some global public-goods producers like Cochrane are in their most fragile funding position ever, and others like Campbell have never been sustainably funded

# One possible model for improving coordination: Use funding as a lever for change

(better address domestic evidence needs with money saved from research waste)



As a group of funders, we have launched some promising pilot projects, but we know we have a long way to go in reducing research waste and in finding ways to collaborate with other funders and to engage impact-oriented evidence producers

## Funders and donors

- Global funders, national funders and donors collectively commit to supporting an evolving suite of **living evidence syntheses** addressing periodically and dynamically prioritized questions (e.g., X teams – equitably distributed around the globe – addressing Y questions)
- Their collaboration could progress
  - Share information → coordinate → pool funds
- They can issue calls with common standards for teams about:
  - processes (e.g., machine learning; merit review by decision-makers, evidence intermediaries, and evidence producers; immediate online posting of updates)
  - products (e.g., foreground equity and context considerations; infographics; downloadable data; open-access publishing)
  - partnerships (e.g., co-production with domestic evidence-support networks and domestic pools of citizen partners)
- They can measure and manage teams' performance (e.g., responsive to needs, agile in finding ways to add value, reliable in quality and timeliness, and partnered with impact-focused domestic evidence-support networks)
- Complemented by national entities funding **domestic evidence-support networks** (and global funders and donors helping to fund those based in low- and middle-income countries)



## Put evidence at the centre for everyday life

- The third implementation priority is where we turn our focus to citizens
- Small-scale responses from governments and from citizen-serving NGOs
  - More focus on polarization and misinformation and efforts to address them
  - More recognition of the need to maximize the benefits of artificial intelligence (e.g., ChatGPT) while minimizing its harms
  - Our own two citizen panels
- Evidence Commission secretariat, the Citizen Leadership Group and their partners are speaking with many citizen-serving NGOs and citizen leaders
  - Goal is to identify what's going well that needs to be systematized and scaled up, and what gaps should be prioritized to fill, and to work with government policymakers and citizen-serving NGOs, among others, to push for improvements



# Context for and challenges with putting evidence at the centre for everyday life

Citizens make many decisions where evidence could be helpful, such as:



Managing my health, safety and well-being (and that of my family's)



Spending my money on products and services



Volunteering my time and donating money

## Three challenges

We live in an era of too much information and lots of misinformation (false information that is spread, regardless of intent to mislead)

We are typically left on our own to find, understand and use evidence

- Opportunity to look for evidence, including time and internet access
- Motivation to look for and make sense of evidence
- Capacity to use digital platforms like websites and social media (digital literacy), select the right sources for them (media literacy), to put what's known in a bigger context (e.g., education, health and climate literacy) distinguish between best evidence and other things and to understand what it may mean for them (evidence literacy) or understand what they are reading (general literacy)

Governments, businesses and NGOs do not set things up to make it easy for us

- Services are commonly offered without evidence to help distinguish among them
- Products are commonly sold in-store and online without evidence to back up their claims (and they may be sold alongside proven products)
- Information is commonly presented online based on profile and search history and not based on evidence (and laws protecting us against advertising and selling products that may be harmful or dangerous, or about making false claims, do not apply yet to information)
- Compelling stories and visuals are commonly created by people with limited evidence literacy

# These are early days in understanding ‘what works’ in putting evidence at the centre for everyday life



Help citizens judge what others are claiming or more generally find (and receive) reliable information on a topic

- Tools and training to develop critical-thinking skills (e.g., [thatsclaim.org](http://thatsclaim.org) and Sense About Science’s risk know-how framework), including in schools
- Plain-language summaries of best evidence on different topics (e.g., Campbell and Cochrane) and accompanying audio-visual materials
- Journalism and science-communication strategies (e.g., fact-checking services, ‘pre-bunking’ to help people know what to watch out for with misinformation and conspiracy theories, and ‘truth-sandwiches’ to what the evidence says immediately before and after covering misinformation)
- Campaigns to build a culture where evidence is understood, valued and used (evidence weeks and #askforevidence hashtag)



Make evidence available to citizens when they are making choices

- Online sites like Wirecutter for shopping products, 80,000 hours for finding high-impact careers or high-impact volunteering opportunities, and GiveWell for giving to the charities that make the most of every dollar they receive
- Tools, such as decision aids, that help to work through options in light of their pros and cons

I often tell my fellow citizen leaders: Google is a great place to go to pick a restaurant or learn more about a public figure; it poses real challenges if you’re looking for best evidence to make an important decision



Engage citizens in asking questions and answering them (with new research or with existing evidence)

- Website questions can be submitted to organizations funding research
- Prioritization processes that engage citizens (e.g., James Lind Alliance)
- Support for citizens to become partners in a research team undertaking a new research study or synthesizing what’s known from all studies addressing the same question

While this approach sounds promising, those of us working in citizen-serving NGOs have come to realize that declining trust in government and business leaders has led to rising concerns about this approach among citizens



Make evidence-based choices the default or easy option

- Laws that require products, services and information to be evidence-based (and make it illegal to spread misinformation)
- Rewards for businesses advertising evidence-based products, services and information (and penalties for not)
- Algorithms for big tech companies presenting products, services and information in part based on supporting evidence (and for limiting the spread of misinformation)
- Using ‘nudge’ strategies to steer citizens towards evidence-based choices, while still allowing them to go look at other choices too (e.g., automatic enrolments, product placements, symbols or ‘kitemarks’)

- We need to capitalize on ‘windows of opportunity’ and not just return to old ways of doing things
  - COVID-19 showed us the perils of many old ways of doing things, but also spurred many innovations that need to become the ‘new normal’ in using evidence to address societal challenges
  - If we don’t act now, we won’t be prepared to pivot to address future crises
- These implementation priorities are highly synergistic
  - While we’ve given more explicit attention to the synergies between domestic evidence-support systems and the global evidence architecture, there are also synergies between domestic evidence-support systems and putting evidence at the centre of everyday life (and citizens are the ones to hold government policymakers and others to account when they do harm or waste money on ineffective solutions)
- The Evidence Commission’s secretariat and Implementation Council are keen to work with any groups interested in contributing to our three implementation priorities
  - Formalize and strengthen domestic evidence-support systems → **conduct or participate in a rapid evidence-support** system assessment for your country and find ways to act on the lessons learned if one has already been conducted
  - Enhance and leverage the global evidence architecture → **encourage funders/donors** -- both in your own country and those operating globally – to be part of the solution **and encourage impact-oriented evidence producers** – especially those producing global public goods like living evidence syntheses – to work in more coordinated ways and to build connections to domestic evidence-support networks and units
  - Put evidence at the centre of everyday life → **support citizen-serving NGOs and citizen leaders** to take action in your country
- The Evidence Commission’s secretariat and Implementation Council also welcome expressions of interest from any groups interested in complementing what we’re doing – with the three implementation priorities, with recommendations that don’t fall within these current priorities (e.g., those related to UN system entities) or with formally monitoring progress against each recommendation

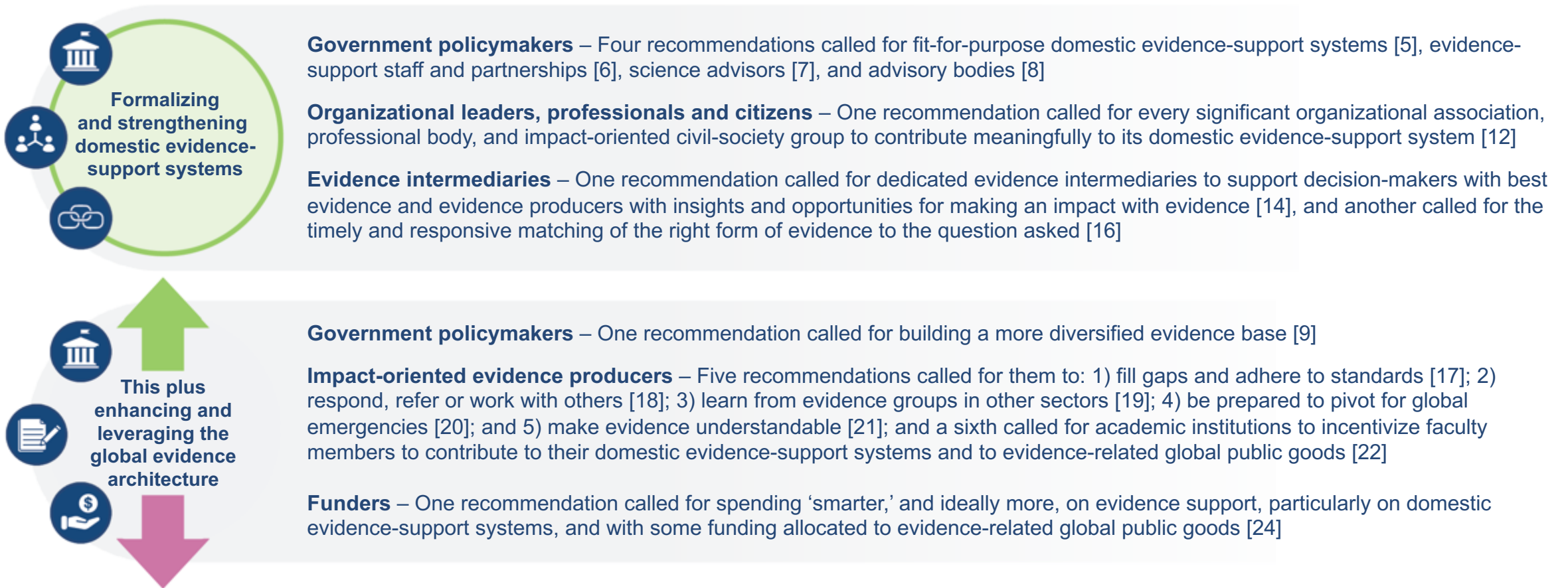


# Appendices



- Four groups are involved in addressing the Evidence Commission’s implementation priorities
  - Evidence Commission Implementation Council
    - Focuses on all three implementation priorities
    - Includes many partners from the COVID-19 Evidence Network to support Decision-making (COVID-END) that spurred the creation of and supported the work of the Evidence Commission
  - Rapid Evidence-Support System Assessment (RESSA) Country Leads Group
    - Focuses on priority 1: formalizing and strengthening domestic evidence-support systems
    - Shares lessons learned from conducting RESSAs in participating countries and taking action based on what was learned
  - Global Evidence Producers Group
    - Focuses on priority 2: enhancing and leveraging the global evidence architecture
    - Discusses opportunities to improve coordination and reduce duplication and ways to engage funders and donors in these opportunities
  - Citizen Leadership Group
    - Focuses on priority 3: putting evidence at the centre of everyday life
    - Provides a forum for citizen leaders and leaders of citizen-serving organizations to shape thinking and action
- The secretariat continues to engage other groups as needed
  - Funders and donors that may be interested in supporting the global evidence architecture
  - Commissioners
  - Translation teams
- The secretariat thanks the Evidence Commission’s funders for their ongoing support of its work
  - American Institutes for Research, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, CMA Foundation / Fondation AMC, Healthcare Excellence Canada, Health Research Board, and Michael Smith Health Research BC

Twenty of the 24 Evidence Commission recommendations can be grouped into the three implementation priorities





### Enhancing and leveraging the global evidence architecture



**Government policymakers** – One recommendation called for incentivizing open science as a key enabler for using evidence in decision-making [10] and another for ensuring that regulatory regimes and ongoing validation schemes for artificial intelligence (AI) optimize AI's benefits for evidence-support systems and minimize its harms [11]

**Impact-oriented evidence producers** – One recommendation called for journals to improve the ways in which they support the use of best evidence [23]



### Putting evidence at the centre of everyday life



**Organizational leaders, professionals and citizens** – One recommendation called on citizens to consider the many ways they can use best evidence in everyday life, and to consider supporting politicians (and others) who enable this [13]

**Evidence intermediaries** – One recommendation called on news and social-media platforms to build relationships with dedicated evidence intermediaries who can help leverage sources of best evidence, and with evidence producers who can help communicate evidence effectively, as well as ensure their algorithms present best evidence and combat misinformation [15]

Four additional recommendations will be the focus of future attention, including:

- two recommendations targeting all who can take action, with one a wake-up call [1] and the second a proposed new standard for responding – to ask for evidence – any time a claim is made (e.g., this intervention works) [2]
- two recommendations targeting multilateral organizations, with one calling for a resolution by multilateral organizations [3] and the second a landmark report [4].