

Course objectives

The Health Systems Learning course entitled “Finding and Using Research Evidence to Inform Decision-making in Health Systems and Organizations” has three main objectives.

The first is to **develop participants’ knowledge about the tools and resources available to health system policymakers and stakeholders** in order to support their use of research evidence. This includes developing an understanding of: 1) the types of questions to ask about a problem, options and implementation considerations; 2) the types of research evidence needed to answer these questions; and 3) the appropriate sources to look for these types of research evidence. Participants will also learn about what quality ratings mean and how to determine the local applicability of research evidence. Dimensions of capacity to find and use research evidence, as well as the range of possible efforts to support the use of research evidence will also be considered.

The second objective is to **enable participants to examine the attitudes that are supportive of using research evidence in health system decision-making**. These attitudes include: 1) working iteratively to understand a problem, options and implementation considerations in light of institutional constraints, interest group pressure, values and many other types of information, as well as ‘external’ factors such as the state of the economy; 2) being systematic and transparent in finding and using research evidence as one input to the decision-making process; 3) finding and using the best available (i.e., highest quality, most locally applicable, synthesized) research evidence in the time you have available; 4) looking first for a perfect match in the available research evidence (to support an instrumental use) and then looking more broadly (to support a conceptual use); and 5) setting clear expectations for others about what to ask and where to go for research evidence, and encouraging their use of related tools.

The third objective is to **enhance participants’ skills in acquiring, assessing, adapting and applying research evidence**. These skills include: 1) clarifying a problem (and its causes), framing options to address the problem, and identifying implementation considerations for an option; 2) searching appropriate sources of research evidence; 3) using AMSTAR to assess the quality of a systematic review; 4) conducting a local applicability assessment; 5) commissioning research to fill gaps in research evidence; 6) sharing an approach to a health system challenge; 7) assessing capacity to find and use research evidence; and 8) identifying gaps in efforts to support the use of research evidence.

Course streams

The Finding and Using Research Evidence course provides participants with the opportunity to engage with course material in two different ways: through a ‘to learn’ stream and a ‘to work’ stream. Those in the ‘to learn’ stream will primarily focus on learning the kinds of knowledge outlined above by engaging with a subset of the course material, whereas those in the ‘to work’ stream will engage with the full range of course material in order to obtain this same knowledge, but to also better understand the attitudes supportive of using research evidence in health system decision-making, and to enhance their skills in acquiring, assessing, adapting and applying research evidence. There is also a third ‘to master’ stream that covers all of the same content, but puts participants in a position to lead others, through supplementary course content that is designed in consultation with course instructors at Health Systems Learning. For more information, contact hslearn@mcmaster.ca.

Course structure and curriculum

The Finding and Using Research Evidence course utilizes a mix of course elements, including instructor-led videos and demonstrations, a range of within-module activities and quizzes, and many task sheets that support a structured approach to particular activities, as well as survey-based evaluations (refer to next page for course overview).

About Health Systems Learning

All Health Systems Learning courses are available in multiple formats, which can be customized to suit your individual and organizational needs. Popular formats include the online course, alone or in combination with a customized in-person workshop, and Forum-hosted training workshops. For more information, please visit www.healthsystemslearning.org or contact us at hslearn@mcmaster.ca.

Course unit	Description of unit	Stream	Course elements
Introduction	Provides an overview of the course, including the different goals that participants can pursue, the course objectives and structure Prompts participants to think about a health system challenge faced by their organization, which will be the basis for much of their work throughout the course	<i>All streams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (1) Task sheets (1)
Section 1: Three key steps in addressing a health system challenge			
Clarifying a problem	Introduces participants to the questions to consider when clarifying a problem, how research evidence can respond to these questions, and how to search appropriate sources for research evidence to respond to these questions**	<i>All streams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (4 for 'to learn', 5 for 'to work') Within-module activities (3) Task sheets (1 for 'to learn', 2 for 'to work')
Framing options to address the problem	Introduces participants to the questions to consider when framing options to address the problem, how research evidence can help to respond to these questions and how to search appropriate sources for research evidence to respond to these questions Introduces participants to the main features of systematic reviews, and their advantages**	<i>All streams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (4 for 'to learn', 5 for 'to work') Within-module activities (4) Task sheets (1 for 'to learn', 2 for 'to work')
Identifying implementation considerations	Introduces participants to the questions to consider when identifying implementation considerations for an option, how research evidence can help to respond to these questions, and how to search appropriate sources for research evidence to respond to these questions**	<i>All streams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (3 for 'to learn', 4 for 'to work') Within-module activities (1) Task sheets (1 for 'to learn', 2 for 'to work')
Section 2: Cross-cutting steps in addressing a health system challenge			
Assessing systematic reviews	Introduces participants to an approach for assessing the quality of a systematic review (using the AMSTAR tool), and for undertaking a local applicability assessment***	<i>All streams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (2 for 'to learn', 4 for 'to work') Within-module activities (4) Task sheets (1 for 'to work')
Commissioning research to fill gaps in research evidence	Guides participants in the 'to work' stream through the process of identifying the most significant gaps in research evidence about the problem identified or options to address the problem	<i>To work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (1) Task sheets (1)
Sharing your approach to a health system challenge	Prompts participants in the 'to work' stream to share their approach to addressing a health system challenge	<i>To work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (1) Task sheets (1)
Section 3: Supporting research use in your organization			
Assessing capacity to find and use research evidence	Introduces participants in the 'to work' stream to an approach to understand their organization's capacity for finding and using research evidence, and to enumerate the incentives and constraints that influence whether and how their organization develops and nurtures this capacity Prompts participants to identify the biggest opportunities for improvement in their organization	<i>To work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (3) Outside of the module activities (1 survey) Task sheets (1)
Participating in efforts to support the use of research evidence	Introduces participants to the possible rationales and definitions for evidence-informed decision-making, and acquaints them with the options available to support the use of research evidence in organizations and systems Prompts participants to enumerate the incentives and constraints that influence whether and how researchers (on the one hand) and policymakers and stakeholders (on the other hand) engage in these efforts	<i>All streams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (3) Task sheets (3)
Conclusion	Provides participants with a brief summary of the course, prompts them to consider whether their own personal goals were met, and suggests options for pursuing additional personal goals	<i>All streams</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Videos (1) Task sheet (1) 1 self-assessment; 1 course evaluation

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*As presented in the online-only module, with indications about whether and how the material pertains to each of the streams. Those taking a combined online and in-person course will cover all of the same material, although there will be additional in-depth discussion of the concepts with the course instructor(s), opportunities for hands-on work on which the instructor can provide feedback in real time, and course activities tailored to the needs and current work projects of participants.

**Participants in the 'to work' stream will be expected to conduct searches of appropriate sources of research evidence.

***Participants in the 'to work' stream will be expected to undertake a quality assessment using the AMSTAR tool, and to conduct a local applicability assessment.

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