RAPID REVIEWS TO STRENGTHEN HEALTH POLICY AND SYSTEMS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

THE NEED FOR RAPID REVIEWS TO INFORM HEALTH POLICY AND SYSTEMS

1. What is the rationale for and objectives of this chapter
   - Policy-makers often need and request evidence to plan, develop, and implement health policies.
   - Systematic reviews are increasingly used to inform policy decisions and produce guidance for health systems, yet the production of systematic reviews is often protracted and misaligned with decision timelines.
   - Rapid reviews have thus emerged as a useful approach to provide actionable and relevant evidence in a timely and cost-effective manner.
   - The objective of this chapter is to introduce the rapid review approach and its application in health policy and systems research.

2. What are the key messages from this chapter
   - Rapid reviews are a useful approach to swiftly provide actionable and relevant evidence to make informed decisions about health systems in routine as well as emergency contexts.
   - Rapid reviews are generated through a transparent, scientific, and reproducible method that respects the key principles of knowledge synthesis.
   - Policy-makers and health systems managers require rapid reviews that address a range of issues, including the effectiveness of health systems interventions and policies, how and in what settings these interventions work, and their cost-effectiveness.
   - Various methods exist to expedite the conduct of reviews to inform health policy and systems decisions; the main challenge lies in accelerating review methods while maintaining robustness and transparency.
   - The complexity of health systems decision-making is both an important challenge and a key opportunity for developing the field of rapid reviews of health policy and systems evidence.

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1. **What is the rationale for and objectives of this chapter**

   - Rapid reviews are increasingly being used and are increasingly influential in the health policy and system arena as policy-makers want evidence reviews to be responsive, timely and credible.
   - A standardized or commonly agreed upon set of methods for conducting rapid reviews does not exist, and the consequences of various streamlining choices for the validity of conclusions from a rapid review are uncertain.
   - The objective of this chapter is discuss potential ways to streamline systematic review methods to produce a rapid review, while maintaining a synthesis process that is sufficiently rigorous to support health policy-making.

2. **What are the key messages from this chapter**

   - Early and continuing engagement with the research requester is essential for focusing the rapid review and ensuring that it is appropriate to the needs of stakeholders. The protocol serves as the starting point for the review, although methodological decisions for rapid reviews are often iterative, involving the stakeholder, and any changes to the protocol should also be reflected in the final report.
   - Methods can be streamlined at all stages of the review process, from search to synthesis, by limiting the search in terms of dates and language; limiting the number of electronic databases searched; using one reviewer to perform study selection, risk-of-bias assessment, and data abstraction (often with verification by another reviewer); and using a narrative synthesis rather than a quantitative summary.
   - Researchers need to make transparent methodological choices, informed by stakeholder input, to ensure that the evidence review is fit for its intended purpose. It is not yet clear how these choices can bias a review, so transparency of reporting is essential.
   - Information technologies can assist researchers in the conduct of rapid reviews by making various steps in the process more efficient. There are multiple examples of tools that can be used to manage references, screen citations, extract data, and assess risk-of-bias.
1. What is the rationale for and objectives of this chapter

- Deviations from standard systematic review methods can be made at multiple points in the review process, leading to numerous rapid review approaches.
- The objective of this chapter is to present methods and recommendations for selecting, abstracting, and assessing studies for rapid reviews of health policy and systems interventions.

2. What are the key messages from this chapter

- A consensus-based approach to rapid review conduct is highlighted, including streamlined methods for literature search (i.e. search more than one database for published studies only, use date and language search limits where appropriate), study selection (i.e. conducted by one reviewer), data abstraction (i.e. one reviewer abstracts, another verifies), and quality assessment (i.e. one reviewer assesses, another verifies). The evidence-base supporting streamlined methods is limited and evolving, and we need further evidence to define robust approaches.
- Rapid review teams should consider including content experts (e.g. in health policy and systems research) and experienced reviewers (e.g. in study selection, data abstraction, and quality assessment) to increase methodological rigour and expedite the review process.
- Eligibility criteria should be well-defined; stated using clear, unambiguous language; and applied consistently.
- Screening, abstracting, and assessing forms, including explanation and elaboration documents that define concepts and terms, ideally with examples, should be used to support reviewers in study selection, data abstraction, and quality assessment.
- Procedures and material should be pilot-tested by the team prior to conducting study selection, data abstraction, and quality assessment.
- Training should be provided to all reviewers at the beginning of the review and during the review to deal with issues that need to be reiterated for consistency purposes.
- Authors of the studies included in the rapid review should be consulted to gather further information on methods conduct, if time allows.

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1. What is the rationale for and objectives of this chapter

- A growing literature addresses methods to accelerate the operational steps of systematic reviewing (searching, screening, data extraction, and appraisal). However, there is no one standard method for conducting a rapid review.

- Strategic methodological choices are often required (given organizational context) to effectively inform complex questions related to health policy and system improvements.

- The objective of this chapter is to discuss the options for synthesizing knowledge about broad and complex issues using rapid review methodology.

2. What are the key messages from this chapter

- A two-stage process of first scoping the literature, then selecting a focus, is an effective approach for conducting health policy and systems reviews under time pressure.

- The complexity of health policy and systems research requires transdisciplinary collaboration, which can, if managed well, speed and enhance a review.

- Initializing a rapid review requires a framework from which to organize the concept under study, based on a set of focused questions or an existing framework (either borrowed or customized) which either remains unchanged – static – or is allowed to evolve as knowledge accumulates from the search.

- Using a static framework may speed a review, but this benefit must be balanced against the risk of missing the significance of a theme that emerges from the literature.

- In areas already covered extensively by existing systematic reviews, a search identifying existing reviews may allow reviewers to summarize and integrate the review findings, resynthesize primary studies, or update the systematic review.
5. ENGAGING POLICY-MAKERS AND HEALTH SYSTEMS MANAGERS IN THE CONDUCT OF RAPID REVIEWS

1. What is the rationale for and objectives of this chapter

- Health-care researchers traditionally have had little engagement with decision-makers who could implement their research findings. This culture has led to significant research waste and slow implementation of research findings. The field of health policy and systems research has advocated a shift in this culture.

- Close collaboration between the decision-maker and producer of the rapid review is particularly important for decision-makers who act at the policy or systems level because their decisions may influence a large proportion of the population. However, researchers often do not know how to engage with decision-makers.

- The objective of this chapter is to discuss the process of engaging policy-makers and health systems managers in rapid reviews.

2. What are the key messages from this chapter

- Engaging policy-makers and health systems managers in rapid reviews increases the relevance and applicability of the reviews to decision-making processes, yet it is time- and resource-intensive.

- There are many ways in which the producers of rapid reviews can engage policy-makers or health systems managers ranging from ad hoc engagement to involvement throughout the entire review process.

- Engagement with policy-makers or health systems managers throughout the review is encouraged, yet such extensive involvement necessitates additional time and resources.

- The level of engagement should be meaningful, yet tailored to available resources, and will depend on the objectives of engagement, the points at which engagement occurs in the review process, and the methods used for engagement.

- Conceptual frameworks, like the framework for effective engagement in comparative effectiveness research, are available to provide a structure and mechanism to facilitate engagement.
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FOSTERING THE CONDUCT AND USE OF RAPID REVIEWS OF HEALTH POLICY AND SYSTEMS RESEARCH IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

Target Audience
Researchers
Decision-makers
Knowledge brokers
Commissioners/funders
Other people/groups/agencies supporting rapid reviews

Summary
Rapid reviews represent a growing support for policy- and decision-making processes in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), yet more systematic fostering of their conduct and use is needed.

Chapter 6: Fostering the conduct and use of rapid reviews of health policy and systems research in low- and middle-income countries outlines the specific challenges of conducting rapid reviews in LMICs, while highlighting the need to develop supportive systems and structures to overcome these challenges.

Strategies described to ensure rapid reviews are conducted and utilized to their full potential include building capacity, addressing methodological concerns, mobilizing sustainable resources, raising the profile of rapid reviews and sharing the knowledge they generate in these countries.

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1. What is the rationale for and objectives of this chapter
   - The conduct and use of rapid reviews are gaining momentum in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs); however it has been a slow start as many LMICs lack supportive political, economic, and scientific institutions and procedures.
   - These gaps make it challenging for researchers to conduct, and decision-makers to use, rapid reviews to inform health policy-making and health system strengthening in these settings.
   - The objective of this chapter is to identify strategies for overcoming these challenges and fostering the conduct and use of policy-relevant rapid reviews of health policy and systems research.

2. What are the key messages from this chapter
   - Although there is some momentum in the use of rapid reviews for decision-making processes in LMICs, experience with rapid reviews remains limited in these settings.
   - Several challenges impede optimal production and use of rapid reviews, including wide variation in their definition, methods, and applicability; inadequacy of resources in LMIC settings; and poor acceptability among academics who may not believe their results.
   - To ensure that the full potential of rapid reviews is achieved in LMICs, there is a need to mobilize and sustain adequate resources. Furthermore, review producers need to address the methodological concerns associated with these reviews.
   - Rapid review producers and knowledge users alike need to set up structures and systems supportive of rapid reviews and also need to improve the sharing of knowledge that arises from producing and using these reviews.

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Full Guide Reference
Click here to view the full guideline.
1. **What is the rationale for and objectives of this chapter**
   - For research to be valuable, it must be reported clearly and transparently, and communicated with the goal of maximizing both uptake and impact.
   - The objective of this chapter is to outline how to report findings from a rapid review of health policy and systems research, and discuss options for dissemination to appropriate knowledge users.

2. **What are the key messages from this chapter**
   - Knowledge users should be identified and engaged early and throughout the rapid review process.
   - Approaches to reporting and dissemination should be discussed with the primary knowledge user as early as the protocol stage.
   - Rapid reviews should prioritize the practical needs of the primary knowledge user over traditional or academic approaches to dissemination, with tailoring of the message and methodological approach to the needs of knowledge users.
   - Relevant reporting guidelines should be used in the development of rapid review reports, to ensure comprehensive and transparent documentation of the rapid review process.

**Summary**

Chapter 7: Reporting and disseminating rapid review findings focuses on knowledge translation and dissemination of rapid reviews. Although producers of rapid reviews have access to the same dissemination tools and channels as systematic reviews, they will need to prioritize the practical needs of the knowledge user over traditional or academic approaches to dissemination.

This chapter describes how to report findings of health policy and systems reviews and recommends the use of reporting guidelines when developing rapid review reports to ensure comprehensive and transparent documentation of the rapid review process. To assist the reader in the development of a dissemination plan, a checklist of essential questions is also provided. Some of the items addressed in the checklist include who would be interested in the findings, how to tailor key messages, helpful communication tools, and how to measure success.

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1. What is the rationale for and objectives of this chapter

- Knowledge synthesis products can help policy-makers or health systems managers make decisions, by summarizing all available evidence related to a particular question.
- According to some decision-makers one such product, the rapid review, is particularly helpful because these reviews provide information in a timely manner. However, the use of evidence (including evidence provided in rapid reviews) to inform decision-making processes varies widely.
- The objective of this chapter is to discuss methods to promote the uptake and use of rapid reviews by decision-makers.

2. What are the key messages from this chapter

- Although rapid reviews can be helpful for health care decision-making, policy-makers and health systems managers do not always commission and use rapid reviews to inform their decisions.
- Barriers to the commissioning and use of rapid reviews include the belief that the results of rapid reviews are not useful or valid, a lack of understanding of how to identify and access relevant rapid reviews, a lack of skills to assess or interpret rapid reviews, and organizational resistance to applying new evidence.
- Researchers can facilitate the uptake of rapid reviews by developing partnerships with policy-makers or health systems managers, and providing education about the validity and applicability of rapid review results, as well as how to identify rapid reviews, and assess and interpret findings.
- In terms of the content of a rapid review report, the following elements will promote uptake: a section on policy implications; a focus on the results and interpretation (with less emphasis on the methods); presenting a summary of the study results using a standardized format (e.g. summary-of-findings tables); targeting messages to key audiences; ensuring that the results are tailored to the knowledge user of the review; and consistent reporting of effect sizes (for quantitative reviews, such as those that include a meta-analysis or statistical combination of multiple studies).
- In terms of formatting a rapid review report, the following aspects will promote uptake: preparing a one-page plain-language summary (i.e. research brief) that includes key messages and the publication date (to indicate how recently the review was performed); using white space to break up dense text; and providing simple one-page tables.