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Doing more with what you know: Knowledge mobilization toolkit



Knowledge Institute
on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions



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Introduction

The child and youth mental health and addictions landscape is continually changing and the evidence base is always expanding. Our knowledge mobilization toolkit, “Doing more with what you know,” is designed to equip you with the resources needed to craft compelling messages, share these with your intended audience and inspire change: in other words, to mobilize knowledge effectively.

This toolkit is intended for anyone working on knowledge mobilization projects, especially for those who are in the initial planning stages of this work, and those working in the child and youth mental health and addictions sector. It is an updated version of our knowledge mobilization toolkit released in 2006, and features new content (clear language, storytelling, navigating challenges) and the latest evidence on knowledge mobilization.

We begin by defining knowledge mobilization and the reasons why we might do it. We then explore how to plan, do and evaluate knowledge mobilization activities.

What is knowledge mobilization?

When we say knowledge mobilization (KMb), what do we really mean?

Knowledge and evidence can get lost in a sea of jargon. Is it knowledge exchange, knowledge translation, integrated knowledge translation or KmB? KmB and knowledge translation (KT) are used interchangeably. KmB is generally used when referring to social sciences and humanities research, whereas KT is used in medicine and the sciences.

These terms encompass a wide range of activities including knowledge synthesis, dissemination, transfer, and exchange. These activities have the goal of making evidence accessible, clear and useful for those who need it (knowledge users).

In the child and youth mental health and addictions sector, KMb speaks to the meaningful use of evidence and expertise to align research, policy and practice to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. For example, let's say an agency that provides services for children has program evaluation data and wants to share the findings in an interesting way with staff and clients who have been involved in the evaluation process. How can they share this information so it is meaningful, useful and accessible? That is where KMb comes in.

KMb is not just about disseminating, sharing or publishing information in one direction. It is about meaningful engagement, end-user participation and working toward using evidence to have an impact. And while research is important, KMb also includes practice-based evidence from service providers, from Indigenous Elders or Knowledge Keepers, and evidence from lived experiences of children, young people and families.



Evidence-based practice:

Evidence-based practice in child and youth mental health integrates high-quality research evidence, clinical expertise, client data and perspectives to obtain measurable outcomes for children, young people and their families..

Why mobilize knowledge?

Knowledge loses value when it sits unused or is inaccessible. KMb helps empower people to use information in strategic ways to address real-life challenges and make improvements. It can help make the case for support from your funders, raise awareness about issues, bring people together and prompt change. In our sector, KMb helps us apply what we know to strengthen mental health and addictions care for children, young people and families.

KMb raises awareness and prompts change

KMb draws attention to issues that matter. It not only expands the way knowledge is shared, but it also helps bring about more effective and sustainable change (Shaxson et al., 2012). KMb can lead to changes in

perspectives or behaviour, and can even prompt cultural shifts within an organization or sector (Zarinpoush et al., 2007). It can inform research (Barwick, 2013; Phipps et al., 2016) and – most importantly – it can help improve client care and outcomes (Reardon et al., 2006). Simply put, KMb helps make things better.

KMb brings people together

All of us value relationships and partnerships that provide mutual benefit. KMb empowers people to cooperate, collaborate and share knowledge on areas of common interest. It promotes fruitful conversations between those who create knowledge and those who use knowledge with a shared desire to solve problems (Reibling, 2012). KMb can help us better understand other perspectives, experiences, language and needs. It helps bring people together to work collaboratively in the pursuit of a common goal.

KMb puts knowledge into action

Learning about the latest evidence and insights in any field is important. But communicating what you have learned with those who can act upon it is powerful. When we are slow to put knowledge into action, it loses its power. KMb bridges the gap between what is known or available – and what is done or used (Farkas & Anthony, 2007). It puts the right information into the hands of those who can use it to improve outcomes in a timely way.



Step 1. Planning

KMb can be an intimidating term, but agencies in Ontario already do it as part of their everyday work. They always have. Participating in workshops, webinars or conferences, and developing printed and online materials for children, families and young people, are all forms of KMb.

Achieving real and measurable impact requires thoughtful and deliberate planning (Fixsen et al., 2005). You will increase the effectiveness and impact of your KMb efforts by developing and implementing a clear plan.

When we are short on time, planning can seem to take away from the actual doing. By laying the groundwork and being deliberate – even if it does take more time and resources – you are increasing the chances that you will achieve your goals. Ultimately, this means the knowledge you are mobilizing will get used and create impact.

Getting started

To begin planning your KMb activities, reflect on the following questions (Lavis et al., 2003).

What is the main message?

Your planning will be guided by a clear vision of the main message you want to communicate and the lessons you want to share. What knowledge are you trying to mobilize?

Step 1. Planning

Example: An agency with multiple locations developed a performance measurement framework to report on mandated data elements and gather data to help strengthen their services. They needed to develop a communications and data collection plan to gather information from programs across their multiple sites. This agency was exploring what performance measurement meant to their team, as well as what data needed to be gathered and reported.

What is the purpose? How will your audience use or apply this information?

Start with the end in mind: what is your goal? Are you looking to inform? Inspire? Engage? Influence? What behaviour change would you like to see? Start by setting a clear goal, as action depends on purpose. Envision your impact and how to get there.

The agency developing a performance measurement framework had multiple goals. They needed to inform teams at different locations about the new data elements. They needed to work collaboratively to get staff buy-in about the relevance of data-gathering and performance measurement. They needed to establish shared knowledge of their agency performance measurement approach. And they needed to work together with staff to make the process useful and relevant.

Who is involved in sharing the information?

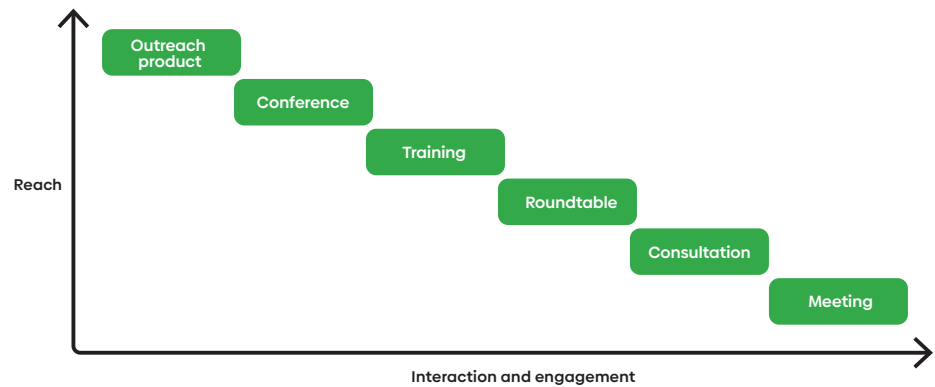
At its core, KMb is about people. It is about communicating valuable information with the right people at the right time, to help ensure meaningful engagement and impact. Form a core team to mobilize the knowledge. Involve credible partners and champions who can share the vision, build understanding, recognize other perspectives, establish personal meaning and build commitment (Lavis et al., 2003).

For this agency, it helped to have a core team planning and leading KMb efforts. Sustainability and flexibility are enhanced when a team collaborates to mobilize knowledge.

Who is the information being shared with?

Who is your audience? Who do you want to use this knowledge? How will you involve them in making sure the information and process are useful and relevant? KMb is not just about putting information out for consumption. It requires actively meeting people where they are and making it possible for them to act on information. It is really important to engage your audience during the planning stage to design and deliver information and tools in a way that makes most sense to them.

Balancing reach and engagement



The agency had to engage with their teams throughout the process. As an agency with multiple sites, this required travel and meetings. “Performance measurement” and “data gathering” can be threatening terms. It was important to build trust and shared understanding so that the staff were a part of the KMb activities, not just the recipients of something new.

How and when will you do this?

Determine the method or strategies you will use to mobilize knowledge. What is the best way to connect people with your message? What do you need to mobilize the information? Think about your goal, available resources, budget, audience, supports and intended impact. These factors will help determine your best methods and strategies. Note: there is no single strategy that will be effective in all situations.

The agency used multiple strategies including meetings, webinars and targeted communication with key leaders to develop their performance measurement framework and share key findings. This agency’s experience with KMb showed that, for some initiatives, it can take several years to support staff through change.

Key considerations for planning KMb



Who?

- Who is involved in sharing the knowledge?
- Who are your partners and who are your champions?
- Who are you sharing this information with?
- Who should be engaged in your KMb activities?



What?

- What knowledge are you planning to mobilize?
- What are your intended goals?
- What are your key messages?



Why?

- Why are you interested in mobilizing this knowledge?
- Are you aiming to educate, inspire, motivate, engage?
- Why are these messages important to your audience?



When?

- When do you hope to mobilize this knowledge?
- Are there other activities taking place at this time that might influence uptake of this knowledge (conferences, awareness days, community events)?



How?

- How will you deliver your message to your audience?
- How will you engage with your audience when developing these messages and during your KMb activities?



Measure

- How will you know you have achieved your goals?
- What type of indicators will you use to measure efforts?
- What evaluation questions will produce meaningful findings?

Engaging with your audience

Community engagement, or meaningful involvement of communities in KMb efforts, should be considered early in the planning stage. It is not only who you engage, but how you engage with them. Engagement requires respect, flexibility, authenticity and power-sharing with the community you're focused on.

Community engagement may occur through formal partnerships involving sustained two-way communication between knowledge producers and community members. This could be done, for example, through a memorandum of understanding, advisory committees, or other means.

Integrated KMb calls for researchers to co-create projects with members of the community who will be making use of the knowledge being mobilized. When community members act as full and equal authors and stakeholders in a project, KMb work can have a greater reach and more meaningful impact with the communities it is aiming to serve (Cameron et al., 2014; Jull et al., 2018; Malik, 2020).

Ethical considerations should be a focus of anyone doing KMb work, particularly when partnering with marginalized communities. Literature on KMb best practices often touches only very generally on ethics. However, Indigenous researchers and their partners have shared specific considerations and best practices for working with Indigenous leaders and communities in producing KMb materials for use in Indigenous communities (Ellison, 2014; Jull et al., 2018; Smylie et al., 2014)

Inequities, privileges and discriminatory power relationships found within research institutions can be both obvious and subtle. They limit Indigenous people's ability to give input on or receive benefit from research being mobilized (Morton Ninomiya et al., 2017). Commonly used Western, colonial KMb models often devalue or exclude Indigenous ways of knowing, sharing and protocol, which makes these models inadequate for Indigenous communities (Smylie et al., 2014).

Step 1. Planning

In the child and youth mental health and addictions context, young people and family members are among the most important stakeholders to engage. As recipients of the service, they have unique insights and knowledge. Meaningfully engaging with young people and family members requires its own set of skills and continued investment. Read more about youth engagement, why it matters and how to engage young people in meaningful ways in our [Youth engagement toolkit](#).

Why do community engagement?

Engaging relevant stakeholders from the community in planning and creating KMb materials ensures that materials are tailored to the audience, increasing the chance of uptake and engagement. It improves access to information and can increase public discourse around the issues. Open, iterative collaboration between knowledge mobilizers and knowledge users allows greater ownership and empowerment among the community. Community engagement can facilitate conversations, strengthen relationships and build trust.

Engagement also presents an opportunity to integrate lived experience and Traditional Knowledge with scientific knowledge, which improves access to information and increases public conversation on the issues. Drawing on local knowledge from a diverse group contributes to a greater understanding of potential community-level impacts and improves evidence available to inform system change (Mendel et al., 2021).

Other benefits include:

- Increasing the chance that projects will be widely accepted and there will be uptake of the findings.
- Enhancing the practicality of solutions.
- Creating solutions tailored to the audience and more likely to be effective.
- Strengthening and building local networks of community members for future projects.
- Allowing space to voice concerns.
- Ensuring regular, ongoing discussion that allows people to express concerns as they arise.

Engage with your community

Once you have determined who your stakeholders are:

- Identify the level of engagement.
 - Determine whether community members are being informed, consulted or partnered with. This can look different depending on the project goals and stakeholder needs, but the goal should always be meaningful engagement.
- Select your engagement techniques.
 - Use engagement techniques that minimize barriers to access, reflect your purpose and are appropriate for the level of engagement you want.
- Decide on the means of communication.
 - Maintain clear, accurate and consistent two-way communication with the community. Ask your audience how they would prefer to be kept up to date. Develop key messages – the main points of information you want your audience to hear.
- Determine your anticipated outcomes of planned engagement.
 - Outline what you think successful engagement would look like. Identify what you want the engagement to accomplish, and what desired outcomes would be for your agency, participants, and the community at large.
- Evaluate.
 - Determine indicators of community engagement that can be used to measure success. Identify areas of improvement and lessons learned. This is explored further in the “Step 3: Evaluating” section of this document.

Tools and resources for planning

[The Knowledge Institute](#) offers a variety of resources to plan for KMB.

Check out the [Resource Hub](#) for access to products such as the [Program Evaluation toolkit](#).

You can also check out these resources:

- The Hospital for Sick Children’s [Knowledge Translation Planning Template](#) provides step-by-step guidance on developing a plan for research developers. A certificate training program is also available.

Step 1. Planning

- The [National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools](#) provides a registry of resources relevant to using and doing KMb in public health.
- [Resources for research knowledge mobilizers](#) are available from the University of Western Ontario.
- [Knowledge translation: Introduction to models, strategies, and measures](#) (developed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison) provides approaches to measuring knowledge use.
- The Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) provides [tips for facilitating effective integrated knowledge translation](#).

Resources focused on Indigenous KMb approaches and working with Indigenous communities:

- The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health has produced a report on [Indigenous Knowledge and Knowledge Synthesis, Translation and Exchange \(KSTE\)](#), which specifically addresses KSTE in a public health context.
- [Aboriginal Knowledge Translation: Understanding and respecting the distinct needs of Aboriginal communities in research](#) gives a high-level overview of Indigenous knowledge translation concepts.

Several online networks supporting KMb efforts:

- The [Canadian Knowledge Transfer and Exchange Community of Practice](#) is a network used to share experiences and practices and build relationships between people interested in KMb.
- [Research Impact](#) is a Canadian KMb network hosted by York University. It helps build meaningful relationships between university researchers and research users in the community.



Step 2. Doing

Now that you have your KMb plan, how are you going to put it into action?

Traditionally, when people thought about sharing research information, it was through peer-reviewed journals and conferences, long reports, and industry or stakeholder meetings (OMAFRA, 2010). There are, in fact, many different ways to share knowledge (Alberta Health Services, 2022).

How can you decide on a strategy that is best for you? It can be overwhelming to think about which one to pick. No single strategy will be effective in all situations and no one approach is better or more effective than others (Alberta Health Services, 2022). Often, a project will require several different strategies to target different audiences.

Choosing your strategy

The strategy you choose should fit the situation and the audience (OMAFRA, 2010). Consider the following questions to identify your key audience:

- Who are they?
- What are their interests and needs?
- Who are your partners and supporters?
- What terms, concepts and language do they understand?
- What form of communication will be best for them?

Types of resources

It is important to consider what resources you have access to. What is your budget for your KMb activities? There are three general categories for doing KMb.

Knowledge products

Knowledge products can be a great way to share information quickly, regularly and accessibly. Examples of knowledge products include reports, fact sheets, infographics, pamphlets, press releases, toolkits (like this one) and e-newsletters.

Particularly in this digital age, these products can be made available instantly from almost anywhere with a computer and internet access. However, some knowledge products promote one-way communication, and your audience may either miss information or choose not to read it. Relying exclusively on digital distribution may also exclude audiences without reliable high-speed internet, such as people living in remote or rural areas, or those unable to afford home internet or a cell phone data plan.

Events

Events and meetings are examples of places where the collaborative, social processes of KMb take place. Examples of events include conferences, webinars, forums, debates, workshops, annual meetings and media events – TV or radio segments, for example.

Although teleconferences, videoconferences and virtual meetings can be cost-effective, in-person events and meetings provide a rich environment for the organic exchange of ideas, collaboration and fostering of connections that may otherwise get lost. Event participants often have common interests, experiences, skills or expertise (Zarinpoush et al., 2007).

Networks

Developing relationships and engaging deeply with networks of knowledge users are vital to effective KMb work (Barwick et al., 2005). Examples of networks include communities of practice, online forums, network push mechanisms (listservs), social media and message boards.

Dialogue within networks can create learning opportunities for all involved, ensuring that information flows between people instead of

going one-way, from knowledge producer to knowledge user (Zarinpoush et al., 2007). Virtual networks can also break down barriers to knowledge-sharing and provide an open, equitable space for KMB (Stewart & Abidi, 2012).

For networks to be successful, sufficient resources and support are needed to ensure engagement and its sustainability. As with any forum, participants need to feel safe to bring their experiences, perspectives and ideas to the table (Zarinpoush et al., 2007).



To learn more about building and sustaining effective communities of practice, consult these [seven principles](#) by Wenger et al. (2002).

- Designing for evolution.
- Opening a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives.
- Inviting different levels of participation.
- Developing both public and private community spaces.
- Focusing on value.
- Combining familiarity and excitement.
- Creating a rhythm for the community.

Now that you have selected your strategies, how are you going to ensure the message is clear and memorable? We'll explore how storytelling and clear language help convey information effectively.

Using storytelling

Storytelling is the use of narrative form to communicate information.

For thousands of years, we have shared information through stories. It is how we naturally construct and organize our lives (Jones & Crow, 2018). These days, we receive much of our information from social media, news sites and entertainment media, which lean heavily on narrative formats.

Why use storytelling?

Compared to descriptive information, stories are more easily understood and better recalled (Dahlstrom, 2014; Mar et al., 2021). Narratives are also inherently persuasive, which can be useful when audiences are hesitant to change.

Step 2. Doing

Storytelling as a form of KMb provides a compelling way to share knowledge gained from lived experience, in an accessible manner (Park, 2019). Indeed, personally relevant stories can increase emotional engagement by making your audience feel more connected to the content you are sharing.

Storytelling has the power to trigger emotions and give meaning to research. By contextualizing research results, storytelling can appeal to both the reason and emotions of audiences (Bourbonnais & Michaud, 2018). Stories can be a powerful tool to communicate the aims or results of a project and therefore motivate engagement. Stories transport knowledge that “can easily be linked to human experience and conceptualized to existing knowledge” (Hecker et al., 2017, p. 25).

The use of storytelling can also reflect cultural values and traditions. Individuals are more likely to engage with a message when the intervention is culturally appropriate and locally relevant (Saini et al., 2020). McCall and colleagues (2021) have found that storytelling has a unique and powerful ability to change behaviour because it allows for more “nuanced, contextualized, and culturally-reflective” information (p. 2). Change can happen when members of the public can clearly see how knowledge is directly culturally relevant to them.

How to use storytelling

Storytelling is more than just a narrative structure. Photos, videos, music and personal anecdotes all bring knowledge to life. There are several strategies you can use to integrate storytelling into your KMb efforts:

- Put a human face on the story. Humans are social beings; we want to relate to others. Adding a human face allows us to resonate with the information.
- Show your voice and personality. Remember that stories are more powerful when they are truthful.
- Include story arcs and create dramatic tension. The best stories start with a challenge, followed by a journey. Present conflicts – which can be, for example, gaps in knowledge or practice – and the ways they can be overcome, such as through the results of a study.
- Add visuals to improve focus and memory, appeal to emotions and make abstract concepts more concrete. Choose visuals that have a clear link to the story.

Step 2. Doing

- Be concrete and do not be afraid to simplify. If you need to explore abstract or difficult-to-grasp concepts, use practical examples, analogies and comparisons.
- Be empathetic. Think about how your audience will respond to the knowledge (and story) being mobilized.
- Be concise and avoid technical terms and jargon. In other words, use clear language.

Using clear language

Clear language is engaging, straightforward messaging tailored to your audience. The language, structure and design should allow the audience to quickly understand the message, pull out what they need, and use the information. Clear language tells the reader what they need to know without using unnecessary words or expressions. It is communicating with your audience so they can understand a concept the first time they read about it or hear it.

Why is clear language important?

Clear language is a key tool for KMb because it:

- Improves two-way interaction between researchers and research users by communicating clear translations of research findings (Phipps et al., 2016).
- Removes barriers between you and your readers, making it easier for everyone to understand and use information.

Clear language is not:

- Improper language use.
- Patronizing.
- Changing the core ideas.
- Inaccurate or incomplete.

Clear language is:

- Concise and easy to read.
- Targeted to your reader.
- Well-organized.
- Useful and effective.

Before you write, answer these key questions

- Who is your target audience?
- What is your communication objective?
- What is your main message?

Tips for using clear language

- Use language that is easy to read and understand.
- Avoid technical or medical terms, or field-specific terminology and jargon.
- Focus on using familiar, everyday words.
- Use an active voice.
- Describe distinct concepts and ideas.
- Provide engaging, catchy phrases and messages to which audiences can easily relate.
- Use lists, tables and images to simplify complex material.
- Know your audience and write for them. Write in a familiar, warm and collaborative way.
- Figure out key messages and list them in order of importance using clear, logical structure.
- Omit needless words.
- Write short sentences, ideally around 20 to 25 words. Keep paragraphs to one topic and aim for no more than five sentences per paragraph.
- Use clear, descriptive titles and headings to identify sections of content.

The Government of Canada's style guide includes [a section on plain language](#) that gives specific tips on word choice and sentence structure to make your writing clearer for all audiences.



Step 3. Evaluating

What is evaluation?

This section of the toolkit provides general information on evaluation and the steps involved. It also covers the specific considerations to keep in mind when evaluating KMb projects.

Evaluation involves systematically collecting information and analyzing it to see whether a program or a project is doing what it set out to do. It tells you how you are doing and helps identify changes that need to be made along the way to help you achieve your goals (Whitman & Wadud, 2013).

There's no single way of doing evaluation. The evaluation process you develop for KMb will depend on your particular needs and circumstances, the KMb strategies used and the changes you would like to see (Bennett & Jessani, 2011).

Evaluating KMb

Maybe you have some really valuable findings to share or maybe you have found a successful way to implement an evidence-based program. Whatever it is, you have done something great and you are looking to share what you have learned and experienced with others. But how do you know if you are using the best strategy? How do you know if the

Step 3. Evaluating

information is getting into the hands of the right people? Are those people using that information? How are they using it?

This is where evaluation comes in. Evaluation can help you assess your KMB efforts, and it is a key component to your project's success.

When developing your evaluation, take some time to consider: What is the expected impact of your initiative? What do you hope to achieve? This will help you plan the scope of your project and select the best evaluation approach (Reardon et al., 2006).

Your evaluation strategy will depend on the goals you want to achieve (Alberta Health Services, 2022; Barwick, 2013; Zarinpoush et al., 2007).

Are you trying to:

- Increase awareness of your findings, current issues on a topic or knowledge in a particular area?
- Increase the user's capacities to apply knowledge?
- Change service providers' beliefs or behaviours?
- Influence a program or policy?
- Integrate knowledge into a decision-making process?
- Prompt a cultural shift?
- Increase collaboration among knowledge producers and users?

Evaluation: Pitfalls to avoid

Evaluation is often overlooked in KMB efforts. As knowledge products and knowledge use can take many different forms, evaluation efforts must avoid an overly narrow lens through which to examine community uptake and use of knowledge. Overly narrow evaluations of KMB may be unable to see some of the diverse ways in which community stakeholders may adapt the knowledge to apply it in practice.

Key steps to take

- Recognize that knowledge can be used “conceptually to change perspectives or ways of thinking, persuasively to influence the thinking and decisions of others ... or instrumentally to make tangible changes to practices” (Worton et al., 2017, p. 124).

Step 3. Evaluating

- Identify KMb goals and expected outcomes prior to developing KMb strategies, as this allows you to create evaluation measures that are in line with goals.
- Evaluate KMb process as well as outcomes.
- Make evaluation an integrated part of the KMb process.
- Ideally, use mixed methods to conduct evaluation. For example, qualitative metrics could help capture social aspects of KMb (practices or experiences) and bring a nuanced understanding of the process, whereas quantitative approaches can measure knowledge uptake and its relationship to intended outcomes (Fazey et al., 2014).
- Avoid an overemphasis on implementation. Rather than focusing on outcomes, evaluation should examine the process of knowledge-sharing and knowledge use.

Methods of evaluation

- Consider analyzing KMb efforts along two dimensions: 1) research dissemination strategies (for example, products, events, and networks); and 2) research use indicators (for example, ease of use, accessibility, collaboration) (Cooper, 2015).
- Examine key KMb mechanisms including capacity- and relationship-building among researchers and decision-makers; changes in the (perceived) credibility and usability of findings; changes in decision-makers' beliefs and attitudes; and incorporation of new knowledge in an actual decision (Kreindler, 2018).

Questions to ask:

- What are the knowledge needs of your stakeholders?
- Is the KMb process meeting those needs?
- How could KMb activities be enhanced?
- What are the intended outcomes of use, both short-term and intermediate/longer-term?

Key considerations for evaluating KMb

Why evaluate?

- Why are you interested in evaluating your KMb efforts?
- Are you looking to assess program growth or improvements? Are you wondering if your KMb plan met its objectives?

What are the goals?

- What questions are important to think about?
- How will you capture the KMb goals, process and impact?

What is the focus?

- A process evaluation examines success of implementation.
- An outcome evaluation assesses if a project is meeting its objectives.
- An impact evaluation explores longer-term impacts like influence.

Who is involved?

- Who values your initiative?
- What do they need from an evaluation?
- How do they want to receive this valuable information?

How will you do it?

- What methods will you use (qualitative, quantitative, or both)?
- Are there existing tools to help you gather your data or will you need to create your own?

Other factors?

- How will you address internal and external factors that may affect the outcome of the evaluation?



Challenges and barriers to KMb and how to overcome them

There are many potential challenges and barriers to KMb that must be carefully considered. This section discusses some of these challenges, along with strategies to help overcome them. Challenges and barriers can include:

- Resource limitations.
- A lack of measurable targets and outcomes.
- Low levels of trust of researchers by community members.
- Lack of adequate high-quality evidence.
- Inaccessibility of evidence.
- Lack of skill or experience in interpreting evidence.
- Lack of interest in the evidence.
- Skepticism of the research process.
- Lack of trust in the evidence.
- Poor infrastructure to support research use.
- Lack of willingness to change existing practices.
- Lack of attention to the differing capacities of partner organizations.
- Challenges measuring impact.

Limitations in resources can be a major barrier to carrying out and expanding KMb activities. Internal resources (financial, time, personnel) are often not available to support KMb, or there may be a lack of training for KMb activities. Providing adequate resources is key. Plan out resourcing and staff time, and consider partnering with other community agencies that are invested in the same topic.

Lack of measurable targets and outcomes

It is important to define clear goals ahead of time. Creating and carrying out a clear and effective KMb strategy increases the impact of research through enhanced accessibility and interaction. Here are some ideas for goals:

- Facilitate connections among diverse stakeholders and support collaboration through event and networking strategies. For example, you can build or tap into existing networks and communities of practice, targeting community presentations, conferences and workshops.
- Increase awareness of empirical or scientific evidence on a topic. This can include public engagement strategies such as presentations, media interviews and articles, as well as academic approaches, including literature reviews, research reports and conceptual papers.
- Change systems and behaviour through education or policy influence – for example, developing curriculum, or writing advocacy materials or policy briefs.
- Increase engagement with research content through translation and multi-media strategies. These could include data visualization, videos, interactive presentations, e-bulletins or arts-based initiatives.

Low trust

Low trust can interfere with forming effective partnerships between knowledge producers and community members. Trust can be identified and measured in multiple ways – for example, the trust between individual community members and a specific researcher, or more abstract trust in research processes. A variety of factors can influence levels of trust in knowledge activities, including: educational attainment; cultural beliefs; individual or community experiences of discrimination, exploitation or trauma by government, medical or research organizations; and other personal or community experiences with research.

Trust can be developed by maintaining ongoing processes of learning and engagement in a community, where community members can ask questions and provide input as collaborators in KMb projects. Engaging various stakeholders in KMb work and building relationships through existing connections can further develop community members' trust.

Lack of adequate high-quality evidence

Inadequate quality evidence can interfere with KMb activities. Weak evidence can include non-peer-reviewed materials or research that does not cite references.

If the base of evidence on an issue is too weak, with too few studies, or too many of them offering only weak evidence, it may be necessary to go back to the drawing board and reconsider the underlying research questions.

Inaccessible evidence

Inaccessibility of evidence can prevent effective community engagement and KMb. Even when available, research may remain inaccessible to community members because it is packaged and disseminated in formats that are difficult to use or understand.

Translating research findings into knowledge products that are more readily accessible – such as infographics, pamphlets, videos, and plain language summaries – can allow community members to access the evidence base and understand the research and its implications.

Lack of interest in evidence among users

A lack of community involvement may have many possible sources, including people's perception that a crisis in the community needs immediate action, rather than action on the slower timeline of a research project. There is a need to center KMb efforts on high-stake issues in order to ensure relevance for the community. You can plan the release of documents at key times when engagement is likely to be higher (for example, to coincide with awareness days) and involve the community early. You can ensure greater uptake by choosing a format for distribution that community members are enthusiastic about. You may also prime the community by releasing preliminary information about your topic by holding introductory conversations and other engagement activities.

Lack of trust in the evidence

Some members of the public may experience mistrust of science and research institutions, due to individual or community experiences of discrimination or trauma caused by the healthcare system or research. Building trust in communities takes time and can involve significant efforts to build both formal and informal relationships outside of the research process. More specifically, people may lack trust in the evidence itself, especially if there are inconsistent results or if practice implications are unclear. Promoting transparency in the research process and building community partnerships can help create trust in the evidence.

Poor infrastructure to support research use

KMb does not happen by itself. It requires organizational infrastructures and policies to support research and evidence use, with sustained effort over a period of time. If this infrastructure or these supports are lacking, it may be necessary to first engage in capacity-building to develop the necessary capabilities to mobilize knowledge effectively.

Lack of willingness to change existing practices

Barriers might be related to an organization's attitudes, awareness, knowledge, skills and the current level of practice. There may be barriers present in the environment as well, such as an institution's culture and structure. A lack of willingness to change could impede KMb efforts. Strategies to overcome this include communication and education, and breaking change projects into smaller milestones. Many lack knowledge of what KMb is and how to do it. KMb efforts may have to begin with educational efforts focused on raising awareness of what KMb is and how it operates.

It is important to be mindful of the differing capacities of partner organizations. KMb requires working together, so special attention must be paid to the ways in which partner organizations may possess different capabilities, infrastructures and resources.

Challenges measuring impact

Impact has been recognized as the “most problematic aspect of studying KMb” (Malik, 2020, p. 5). Challenges to studying research impact are characterized by tensions around defining impact, distinguishing between research use and impact, and designing metrics to assess impact. Understanding research use in its various forms can help inform how impact is measured; understanding the context for research use is essential to facilitating and measuring research uptake.

Tools and resources

Looking for more information to help you evaluate your KMb efforts?

The [Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions](#) has a number of evaluation resources within the [Resource Hub](#), including:

- The [Program evaluation toolkit](#) contains tools and templates for planning, doing and using evaluation, including a template and support for developing a logic model.
- The [Measures database](#) is a growing online directory that profiles measures related to child and youth mental health and addictions and program evaluation.

Or check out these additional resources:

- The [Innoweave developmental evaluation self-assessment tool](#) can help you determine your community’s readiness and capacity to use a developmental evaluation approach.
- The [Community Tool Box](#) provides resources and tools to help people work together to build healthier communities, including information on evaluating community programs and initiatives.
- The [National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools](#) provides a registry of resources relevant to using and doing knowledge translation in public health, including some relevant to evaluation.
- [Knowledge translation: Introduction to models, strategies, and measures](#) (developed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison) provides approaches to measuring knowledge use.
- [The good indicators guide: Understanding how to use and choose indicators](#) is a practical resource for using indicators to monitor and improve performance, systems or outcomes.



Examples from the field

Evidence Exchange Network: A network of networks doing KMb

KMb looks a little different when it is done across a large network. See how the Evidence Exchange Network (EENet) makes it work:

EENet is a knowledge exchange network that aims to make Ontario's mental health and addictions system more evidence-informed. The network makes evidence available and easy to use, and brings a range of people together – from researchers, service providers and policymakers, to people with lived experience – to share knowledge. EENet is founded on a “network of networks” concept, building on how stakeholders are already connected and able to leverage resources and facilitate local and province-wide linkages.

Through its online community [EENet Connect](#), EENet facilitates discussions related to mental health and substance use. Topics include: children and youth; Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); system coordination, transitions and partnerships; lived experience; and health promotion and prevention. EENet Connect members also use the space to disseminate their own calls for proposals, abstracts, resources, interesting news, events and more.

EENet also provides knowledge exchange support to system-level projects such as the French Language Services Network, as well as various communities of interest and communities of practice, including the [Canadian Housing First Network](#). EENet's team of knowledge brokers and communication specialists share, plan and host virtual and in-person events; develop a variety of resources (promising practices, research snapshots, others); and act as connectors for the system.

EENet is a broad network that aims to help build capacity in mental health and addictions in Ontario by responding to knowledge gaps and ensuring practices and policies are informed by evidence. EENet also seeks to create relationships, promote mutual understanding, and build capacity to find, create, share and use relevant knowledge.

EENet defines “evidence” as:

- Research evidence.
- Practitioner experience.
- Cultural knowledge.
- Lived experience.

How is KMb different in a network of networks?

- You can avoid duplication. EENet connects existing networks, community members, communities of interest and other collaborations to enhance connections in Ontario’s mental health and addictions system. It builds on the capacity of numerous stakeholders and local, provincial, and national mental health and addictions organizations.
- You can reach further. EENet has close to 17,500 stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, service providers, system planners, implementation and knowledge translation professionals, school mental health leads, youth mental health court workers, persons with lived experience, family members and more. EENet’s regional knowledge exchange leads are spread out across the province, giving the network provincial reach.
- You can connect in multiple ways. In addition to its online community, EENetConnect.ca, EENet uses its website, e-newsletter, social media, as well as in-person and virtual events, to connect people and make evidence easy to access.

What helps?

EENet is part of the [Provincial System Support Program \(PSSP\)](#) at the [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#). PSSP works to advance health equity and support service providers across sectors to deliver the best care for all communities and populations. This means striving to provide organizations with the evidence, tools, training, and supports they need to reach their collective goals, as well as acting as a connector and advocate in response to emerging system needs and priorities. Being part of PSSP and CAMH is a key facilitator of EENet’s work. In the past,

Examples from the field

EENet received funding from Ontario's Ministry of Health, as well as from Health Canada's Drug Treatment Funding Program.

EENet receives direction and guidance from an advisory committee representing the diverse perspectives of key stakeholders of the network and includes provincial and national organizations. The committee helps to ensure that the network aligns with and leverages what others are doing in the system to increase impact.

Measuring impact

EENet evaluates its efforts. EENet has an evaluation plan that guides its continuous quality improvement efforts, such as stakeholder feedback to improve its webinars and web analytics to track the success of its social media efforts.

To learn more about EENet's KMb efforts, contact kmb@camh.ca or check out EENet.

Knowledge Institute on Child and Youth Mental Health and Addictions: COVID-19 Response

From the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Knowledge Institute has responded to the information needs of our agency partners to quickly deliver current evidence on how children, young people and families have been affected by the pandemic. In other words, we have mobilized knowledge in a variety of ways that support agency leaders and service providers to navigate care delivery during times of crisis response and recovery.

In collaboration with the CHEO Research Institute, we launched a research project to better understand how our sector could help children, young people and families throughout the pandemic. First, we asked young people and parents or caregivers how COVID-19 had influenced their mental health, service access and preferences. One year after our initial research, we checked in with young people to see how they were doing, if they had accessed mental health services and what improvements could be made to existing supports in the context of COVID-19. Findings from this work were used to create user-friendly [research summaries and infographics](#) for our partners and inform future KMb activities.

Examples from the field

Since 2020, we have produced a series of [evidence summaries](#) on pandemic-related topics for our sector to take up for service planning and well-being promotion. The last three years have shown us how important it is to keep up with the evolving evidence related to children, young people and families' mental health experiences, and to learn from their lived experiences to shape our response. Between April 2020 and February 2022, we developed eight evidence summaries on issues including supporting bereaved families, talking to children and young people about COVID-19 and supporting the wellbeing of mental health service providers.

With our child and youth mental health and addictions agency partners, we have hosted several webinars throughout the pandemic. Webinars focused on preparing children and young people for back-to-school early in the pandemic, mental health in children younger than age 6, and leaders' experiences managing teams during this crisis.

As we have transitioned from being in a state of crisis to moving through the pandemic, a key part of our response has been the [Spotlight on COVID-19 recovery webinar series](#). We designed this series to answer stakeholders' most pressing questions related to recovery from COVID-19, drawing on the latest evidence along with insights from experts working in this area. To date, we have brought together knowledge experts, agency leaders, clinicians, young people and families to share current, credible evidence; lived experience; strategies and tools related to technology overuse; and the implementation of hybrid workplaces. Depending on audience needs, we intend to draw on information shared in this series to develop knowledge products like tip sheets, topic primers and resource lists.

We remain committed to supporting agencies, services providers, and children, young people and families by reviewing and mobilizing the evolving evidence on pandemic impacts through a variety of communication platforms (conferences, social media, peer-reviewed publications, our resource hub, webinars) to broaden reach and improve accessibility.

To see these resources and learn more about our KMb work on COVID-19, check out [our COVID-19 response page](#).

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