

Recommendations: Opportunities to Strengthen the Market

The market for evidence on effectiveness is complex and changing, and there are no straightforward solutions for the identified gaps. Furthermore, it is not only a matter of improving the clearinghouses. Even an ideal set of clearinghouses would not be sufficient to change behavior and ensure the use of evidence, given that this information is only one input to the decision-making process. Strengthening the market for evidence on effectiveness will require efforts by a variety of actors over many years.

The recommendations put forth in this report represent our perspectives on what needs to be done to help address the six gaps identified in the market for evidence on effectiveness. Given that this is still an evolving market, in many cases it is not clear that a single entity is responsible for acting on the recommendations. We have provided our perspective on who should lead for each recommendation, whether clearinghouses, evaluators and other researchers, or federal agencies and other clearinghouse sponsors. We recognize additional discussion and experimentation may be necessary to determine the appropriate actor. With these recommendations, we hope to stimulate further discussion and action among the critical stakeholders.

We also have noted an approximate time frame for each recommendation, to indicate whether we believe the designated actors can take action in the short- or long-term (although it might take longer to see the intended results or impact):

- **Short-term:** relatively straightforward recommendation, which can be undertaken in the next one to three years
- **Long-term:** recommendation that might be challenging to implement and/or have a lot prerequisite activities, and that will require three or more years

Here we put forward three sets of recommended actions: those to **strengthen the supply** of evidence on effectiveness, those to **build demand** for this information, and those to **develop infrastructure** for the market on evidence.

Strengthen supply

1. Increase the number of studies on interventions available

Create a registry of impact studies: Evaluators should be encouraged to register planned impact studies of interventions in a central, shared, public registry, along with key identifying characteristics such as study size, type, population, and timeline. Such a registry would increase the likelihood that study results, including those with ineffective or mixed findings, are shared and make it easier for suppliers and practitioners to find them. The field of medicine provides a strong example of this approach, as all clinical trials are required by law to be registered in order for results to be published.

- **Main actors:** Third-party organizations or federal agencies (create/host registry); evaluators (register studies)
- **Supporting actors:** Federal/state government grant programs and other funders change grant requirements
- **Time frame:** Short-term

Make all studies public: Evaluators should make all impact studies, especially ones funded by public dollars, available to clearinghouses and others for review. This would allow clearinghouses to be more comprehensive in what they display. To achieve this, funders—in particular, the government—should require that grantees submit studies to the relevant government or private clearinghouse for review.

- **Main actors:** Evaluators submit studies for review
- **Supporting actors:** Federal/state government grant programs and other funders change grant requirements to require submission
- **Time frame:** Short-term

Display all studies and interventions: Clearinghouses should include *all* available studies and known interventions. In addition to interventions that they judge to be effective, clearinghouses should display reviewed interventions with negative, insufficient, or inconclusive evidence, as well as interventions with unknown evidence (i.e., interventions without any studies or with studies that have not yet been reviewed). Including such information would help to engage users who want to see a comprehensive comparison of interventions. Clearinghouses must be thoughtful in how they post and articulate these additional studies and interventions so that users easily understand the distinction.

- **Main actors:** Clearinghouses display all studies and known interventions
- **Time frame:** Short-term

Review prioritized studies and interventions: Clearinghouses should try to review more studies and interventions, prioritizing them based on user demand in order to best use limited resources. Ideally, this method would include directly asking users (current and potential) what topics and outcomes most interest them. This would help increase the relevance of clearinghouses to users. Clearinghouses should also articulate and share this prioritization method on their sites, so the ordering is clear to users.

- **Main actors:** Clearinghouses review more relevant studies/interventions; prioritize topic areas by user interest
- **Time frame:** Short-term

2. Increase the amount of information on interventions available

Include more intervention detail on clearinghouses: Evaluators should include additional information—about the purveyors, costs, timelines, implementation support, and target population—in intervention studies so that it is readily available to clearinghouses. For this to happen, government grant programs and other funders should require grantees to include this information in their studies. Developers, providers, and communities also need to help ensure this information is collected and made available to the evaluators. Clearinghouses should then systematically capture and display this additional information for the interventions listed on their sites. They should also articulate where data is not available, as the information (or lack thereof) will help decision makers understand the implications of selecting a particular intervention.

- **Main actors:** Evaluators include detailed intervention information in studies; clearinghouses display additional information
- **Supporting actors:** Federal/state government grant programs and other funders change grant requirements; developers/providers collect and share information
- **Time frame:** Short-term

Develop a system to connect peers: To help decision makers learn from their peers, it would be ideal to develop a way for decision makers to connect with peers who have relevant experiences with a particular intervention. This could happen in a variety of ways, from a publically available database of which interventions communities are using, to an online platform or discussion forum. Whichever form this system takes, it would require some sort of verification or registration process to ensure it is used appropriately. Additionally, this system should be linked to clearinghouses to allow decision makers to easily navigate between data and peer information. A pilot would likely be necessary in order to determine the best way to connect decision makers to peers without overwhelming already busy practitioners. Given the strong foundation and widespread knowledge of the What Works Clearinghouse, the education field might be a good choice for a pilot. If the pilot is successful, this approach could be expanded so that each domain has a peer connection system.

- **Main actors:** Third-party organizations host and monitor peer connection systems
- **Time frame:** Long-term

3. Increase the types of reviews available, not only reviews of single interventions

Conduct more meta-analysis: Researchers should evaluate more practices (e.g., types of interventions, model components/characteristics) through systematic reviews or meta-analysis, and make this information available to decision makers both directly and through clearinghouses. Clearinghouses should include or direct decision makers to existing meta-analyses but should also consider evaluating more practices themselves to appeal more to audiences less interested in specific program models. To do so, clearinghouses

could leverage their existing repositories of study reviews. Without additional resources, this might require a trade-off of time for clearinghouse researchers. Also, this shift might not be relevant for all domains, as meta-analysis requires a substantial number of controlled studies from which to draw conclusions.

- **Main actors:** Researchers conduct more meta-analysis/systematic reviews; clearinghouses conduct and display more meta-analysis/systematic reviews
- **Supporting actors:** Federal agencies and other clearinghouse funders encourage clearinghouses to reallocate resources to include more meta-analysis and systematic reviews
- **Time frame:** Long-term

Create more synthesis reports: Synthesizers should continue to develop summary reports or best practice guides about interventions using information from clearinghouses. These reports should be made available to decision makers both directly from synthesizers, and through clearinghouses and other information sources, where appropriate. For example, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (which sponsors the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices), provides some synthesized information through *A Guide to Evidence-Based Practices*, which lists available resources by topic area. When resources permit, clearinghouses also should start playing a larger role in creating synthesis reports or guides themselves, leveraging their underlying databases of interventions. This may require a trade-off of time and resources from continuing to review studies and interventions, which each clearinghouse will need to evaluate for itself.

- **Main actors:** Synthesizers continue to provide synthesis; share with clearinghouses and decision makers; clearinghouses conduct more synthesis; connect decision makers to additional resources, where possible
- **Supporting actors:** Federal agencies and other clearinghouse funders encourage clearinghouses to reallocate some resources to include or direct decision makers to synthesis
- **Time frame:** Long-term

Build demand

1. Increase awareness of sources for evidence on effectiveness, particularly through existing networks

Educate practitioners about evidence: Education and training programs for practitioners (e.g., pre-service teacher programs) should include guidance on evidence. Practitioners should learn about the importance of using evidence on effectiveness to make decisions. They should also be introduced to resources for information on evidence and trained on how to understand and interpret this evidence. Introducing these concepts and skills to the next generation of social sector leaders has the potential to create a significant culture shift toward evidence.

- **Main actors:** Practitioner training programs and in-service professional development/executive education opportunities adjust curriculum
- **Supporting actors:** Clearinghouses, researchers, and synthesizers provide information for training programs
- **Time frame:** Short-term

Harness the power of peer networks: Informal and formal peer networks, including professional associations and learning communities, should leverage their position as connectors and gatherers to encourage use of evidence and effective interventions. These networks should raise the topic of evidence more often with their constituents, directing them to the relevant resources, fostering discussions, and encouraging the sharing of experiences. Intermediaries—in particular, advisers—also should increase broad marketing to and education of decision makers. While continuing to target decision makers directly, they should also tap into peer networks to reach decision makers where they are—with information that is presented in an accessible way. Intermediaries should focus these marketing efforts on increasing awareness about their own role. However, they also should try to increase awareness about the importance of evidence more generally and the availability of clearinghouses as a resource for evidence on effectiveness. While there is a wide range of existing peer networks, further research might identify a lack of such associations for key decision makers in certain domains and therefore a need to either develop new ones or expand existing ones.

- **Main actors:** Peer networks encourage discussion and use of evidence on effectiveness; advisers, synthesizers, and researchers create marketing plan and focus on raising awareness through peer networks
- **Time frame:** Short-term

Engage and target intermediaries: Advisers, synthesizers, and researchers play an important role in reaching the ultimate decision makers and helping with selection of effective interventions. To the extent possible, clearinghouses should ensure such intermediaries are equipped with the appropriate information to play this role. In order to do so, clearinghouses should identify and market specifically to the intermediaries, engaging them to better understand and integrate their needs and preferences into the websites themselves. Clearinghouse outreach should encourage intermediaries to use clearinghouses as a resource for their own work and guide decision makers to clearinghouses to help in their selection processes. As the intermediary market is still growing, in the near term, clearinghouses should continue their existing efforts to market and reach out directly to decision makers.

- **Main actors:** Clearinghouses market to and engage key intermediaries
- **Supporting actors:** Advisers, synthesizers, and researchers provide candid input to clearinghouses to facilitate improvement
- **Time frame:** Short-term

2. Reduce barriers to use of clearinghouses

Clearly explain role of clearinghouse: Clearinghouses should articulate their purpose and points of differentiation from other information sources. They should define a specific objective and identify a small number of target audiences, with designations of how each audience should use the website. Clearinghouses should also describe how their websites are different from other information sources (e.g., focused only on interventions with the strongest evidence, looking at different intervention outcomes or target populations). This information should be readily accessible to all users on the website.

- **Main actors:** Clearinghouses adjust websites to incorporate clear articulation of differentiation
- **Time frame:** Short-term

Enhance clearinghouse usability: Clearinghouses should update their websites to enhance web design, functionality, and search optimization, incorporating best practices and user feedback. There is also an opportunity for clearinghouses to share with each other their techniques and user feedback—particularly among the federal clearinghouses where a cross-agency mechanism for discussion already exists. In general, clearinghouses should be looking to improve overall usability, such as by: leveraging search engine optimization to ensure easy location of their websites; ensuring that primary information is displayed in a general ‘F-shaped pattern’ (which is known to be used when reading web content); providing a search bar in the top right of their websites; and limiting the number of clicks to intervention summary information.

- **Main actors:** Clearinghouses update websites to incorporate best practices; share best practices with each other
- **Supporting actors:** Federal agencies and other clearinghouse funders encourage clearinghouses to update web design and functionality; nonprofits provide expertise and technical assistance to clearinghouses for website updates
- **Time frame:** Short-term

3. Guide decision makers through the selection process

Provide self-guided selection tools: Clearinghouses should include self-guided tools and supports on their websites to help decision makers with selection. In particular, all clearinghouses should provide functionality to sort and filter interventions by multiple dimensions of the interventions’ target population (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity), if they do not have this already. This functionality helps decision makers select interventions relevant for their specific context and needs. Clearinghouses should describe how online tools should be used and what additional research might be necessary to make a decision. Clearinghouses should acknowledge that for many decision makers, such self-guided tools and supports will only be a first step, and it will be necessary to consult advisers for hands-on guidance.

- **Main actors:** Clearinghouses develop additional self-guided tools and supports; in particular, allow users to search by target population
- **Supporting actors:** Federal agencies and other clearinghouse funders encourage some reallocation of resources for clearinghouses to include more self-guided tools
- **Time frame:** Short-term

Connect decision makers with adviser market: Clearinghouses should try to educate decision makers about how advisers can be helpful in providing hands-on selection and implementation supports. They should guide decision makers on how to find advisers in their domains and direct them to any known existing advisers. We recognize government-run clearinghouses may be constrained in providing direction to external resources. However, clearinghouses should not feel the need to be comprehensive or consider these resources to be referrals.

- **Main actors:** Clearinghouses provide guidance on adviser market
- **Time frame:** Short-term

Develop infrastructure

1. Establish common standards

Create common evidence standards: Common evidence standards for reviewing and validating studies should be developed in order to create consistent definitions and guidelines across clearinghouses and help alleviate some of the confusion for decision makers. These evidence standards should include a common spectrum of evidence and a common language to articulate different tiers around level of impact, rigor, and replicability of an intervention. Efforts currently underway to define standards for categorizing evidence and applying it to decision making include the recently announced *Common Guidelines for Education Research and Development* and the *Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR)* (see [Appendix 2](#)). Any new effort should work with and build off of these current efforts, likely requiring a public-private partnership.

- **Main actors:** Public-private partnership facilitates creation process
- **Supporting actors:** Clearinghouses and other sources of information adhere to standards
- **Time frame:** Long-term

Create common standards across the supply chain: Common standards also should be developed across the supply chain, including those for designing and conducting studies, implementing interventions, and providing technical assistance. Common standards at these steps in the supply chain would help increase the quality of studies submitted, make reviewing and comparing studies easier for clearinghouses, and help practitioners more consistently

and successfully implement interventions. Additional research is needed to understand what standards are in use today, if any, and to identify the right organization (likely a public-private partnership) to facilitate the development of common standards.

- **Main actors:** Public-private partnership facilitates standards creation process
- **Supporting actors:** Evaluators conduct studies according to standards; practitioners implement according to standards; intermediaries provide support according to standards
- **Time frame:** Long-term

2. Increase coordination among suppliers

Create a coordinating body for clearinghouses: Public and private entities should partner to create a group that will coordinate activities for clearinghouses and other information sources for evidence on effectiveness. This group should include representatives from each clearinghouse, key decision makers, and intermediaries, as well as a third-party organization to facilitate. The group should focus on activities such as creating and implementing standards and educating stakeholders about evidence on effectiveness and available resources.

- **Main actors:** Third-party organization create/facilitate coordinating body
- **Supporting actors:** Clearinghouses, intermediaries, decision makers participate in the coordinating body
- **Time frame:** Long-term

3. Build a vibrant adviser market

Build and expand adviser market: Effective, affordable advisory organizations should be created and expanded to help decision makers select effective interventions. These advisers would ideally work with decision makers to understand their needs, identify potential interventions or solutions, and select the option that best fits their communities. Through our research, we identified several types of actors that currently fill this role, including: public and private universities, which often have departments and/or graduate students with expertise in a specific domain and local context; state or local government-funded centers (e.g., Evidence-based Prevention and Intervention Support Center in Pennsylvania); existing resource centers, which can provide more hands-on support (e.g., Regional Educational Laboratories, National Resource Centers); and for-profit firms for communities that are able to allocate resources for support. Other examples of effective models of advisers likely exist. Given the growing interest in evidence on effectiveness and the clear need for additional supports, this market is ripe for innovation and growth.

- **Main actors:** Universities, state and local governments, resource centers, and for-profit firms create or further develop advisory function
- **Supporting actors:** Funders support development of advisers to spur use of evidence
- **Time frame:** Long-term

Include funds for selection support: In recent years, several funders have started providing grants that require grantees to select from a list of effective interventions. In such instances, funders should ensure grantees have the support they need to select the intervention that is the best fit for them. This may include funding for the grantee's time spent systematically evaluating options or to pay for an adviser.

- **Main actors:** Federal/state government grant programs and other funders include funds in grants to support selection
- **Time frame:** Long-term