

NAVIGATING COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY: WHO GUIDE ON DECISION-MAKING WHEN FACING COMPLEXITY AND UNCERTAINTY

Informal Consultation
20 June 2023, 1:00-2:30 p.m. CEST

Scope and purpose

Background

Improving the lives of three billion people, through universal health coverage, addressing health emergencies and promoting healthier populations is certainly an ambitious mission, but it inspires all our work at the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Evidence to Policy and Impact Unit in the Research for Health Department/Science Division aims to strengthen the regular use of context-specific research evidence to catalyse the implementation of the 13th General Programme of Work, which calls for heightened accountability, prioritizing impact and outcomes at country level.

The importance of evidence-informed decision-making

The role of research in supporting effective health policy and improved practice has been emphasized across clinical care, public health and health systems decision-making. Evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) is a systematic and transparent approach to help translate that research into inputs that can support policy-making processes. EIDM has the potential to facilitate a more efficient use of scarce resources in health systems and improve the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of health policies and interventions. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has brought into the limelight challenges that arise when making decisions in the context of complexity and uncertainty of evidence.

New guidance for making decisions when facing complexity and uncertainty

Decision-makers today need to take timely, well-informed decisions in an ever-changing and complex environment. They face particularly complex problems – such as climate change and health – that are multifactorial in nature, even when the evidence is uncertain or contested. Emergency situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, expose policy-makers and other decision-makers to high levels of uncertainty, while life-saving responses and actions need to be identified rapidly, and the public trust in government decisions maintained. Also during routine decision-making processes, a full understanding of the problem, its causes, consequences, and effective interventions how to tackle them may be missing. This guide is to help readers when facing such challenges, to nonetheless maintain a systematic and transparent approach while drawing on different forms of evidence and engagement processes.

This guide has been developed by combining the direct experience of decision makers with the research literature about different ways to involve stakeholders in the process of making decisions or the process of conducting research that is designed to inform decisions. By offering this supporting guidance, WHO can help ensure that EVIPNet member countries and other decision makers are clear about the complexities they face and the uncertainties of research evidence to choose approaches that reduce uncertainties and manage risk when making decisions.

Goal

To convene WHO-internal and WHO-external experts and users for a consultation to enrich the content and use of the new WHO Guide on Decision-making when facing Complexity and Uncertainty.

Objectives

1. Get familiarized with the Guide, its proposed approach and its content.
2. Identify gaps/missing areas as well as ideas on innovation in decision making by tapping into the expertise of participants.
3. Explore the potential uses of the guide, including partnerships to amplify its reach.

Outputs

Notes compiled from the consultation, including mentioned practices, tools and other recommendations and ideas, as well as technical input provided by the experts and users.

Outcomes

Increased understanding of the content and use of the guide. Increased awareness and interest in using the guide in the future.

Audience

WHO-internal and WHO-external experts and users.

Approach

Virtual presentations, breakout discussions, collective plenary.

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Agenda

Time (CEST)		Facilitator
1:00-1:10	Welcome and introduction	Tanja Kuchenmüller , Unit Head, Evidence to Policy and Impact, Research for Health Department/Science Division/WHO Laurenz Mahlanza-Langer , Chair of the Editorial Board, Director, South Africa Centre for Evidence (SACE)
1:10-1:30	New WHO Guide: Decision-Making when facing complexity and uncertainty , followed by Q&A	Sandy Oliver and Kelly Dickson , University College London
1:30-2:10	Deliberative dialogues on important challenges and potential responses to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complexity of contexts 2. Uncertainties of evidence 3. Potential uses of the guide (breakout session & production of collective murals)	Laurenz Mahlanza-Langer Sandy Oliver Kelly Dickson
2:10-2:25	Plenary discussion – reporting back	Laurenz Mahlanza-Langer
2:25-2:30	Wrap-up and next steps	Tanja Kuchenmüller