

# Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Colorado: Glossary of Terms (August 2023)

## Introduction

This glossary provides definitions that are used in evidence-based decision-making (EBDM). Having shared definitions among governmental and non-governmental stakeholders across the state is a key step forward in helping to operationalize [Colorado's statewide vision of EBDM](#). These definitions are intended for use by all stakeholders in policy development, policy implementation, budget development, strategic planning, in conducting and sharing research/evaluation, and other EBDM activities.

These definitions were developed based on a literature review and input from subject matter experts and practitioners across Colorado, with the aim of supporting alignment with current statutorily-defined, rule-defined, and commonly-used definitions.

This glossary is a living document. If you have feedback on the definitions or would like to request that additional terms be added, please contact [courtney@coloradolab.org](mailto:courtney@coloradolab.org).

## Definitions

**Best Available Research Evidence:** Refers to the weight of the research evidence from the most rigorous and relevant studies available about a practice or policy, identified using a systematic process; includes both numbers-based (quantitative) and narrative-based (qualitative) data.

**Continuous Quality Improvement:** An iterative process of making changes and improvements to a practice or policy in its local context to increase efficiency or improve outcomes based on information that has been learned over time from evidence-building.

**Evaluation:** A systematic method for collecting, analyzing, and using data to examine the implementation (process or formative evaluation) and/or effectiveness (impact or summative evaluation) of a practice or policy.

**Evidence-Based Decision-Making (EBDM):** The intersection of the best available research evidence, decision-makers' expertise, and community needs and implementation context. Recognizes that research evidence is not the only contributing factor to decisions. Other equally important factors include resourcing, cultural values, community voice, and feasibility of implementation.

**Evidence-Building:** An iterative process of building evidence—including articulating a theory of change, examining implementation, and assessing outcomes—that supports a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of a practice or policy and continuous quality improvement. Follows [Colorado's Steps to Building Evidence](#).

**Impact Evaluation:** An evaluation that uses appropriate methods (randomized controlled trial or strong quasi-experimental design) to measure the degree to which a practice or policy causes the observed changes in outcomes.

**Outputs:** The activities, goods, or services provided by a practice or policy. One common output measured in process evaluations is reach or number served.

**Outcomes:** Measures of what a practice or policy is meant to improve for its target population; for example, improved academic achievement or reduced recidivism. Outcomes, which are typically measured in an impact evaluation, are the observable effects of the outputs according to the theory of change.

**Policy:** A law, ordinance, regulation, procedure, administrative action, incentive, or voluntary practice of governments or other institutions. Policies exist at the macro, meso, and micro level and set the context in which individual decisions and actions are made.

**Policy Decision-Makers:** Those who create policies and/or are responsible for policy implementation. Includes legislators, commissioners, board members, and the governor (who have policy setting authority); agency leaders such as executive and division directors and the governor (who have rule-interpretation authority); and administrators such as program staff (who are responsible for implementation).

**Policy Influencers:** Those who inform creation and/or implementation of policies. Influencers include both organizations (e.g., advocacy organizations, technical assistance providers, professional associations) and individuals directly impacted by the issue area/potential policy.

**Practice:** A program, intervention, or approach with explicitly defined and replicable elements that is hypothesized to improve specified outcomes for a defined target population.

**Research:** A systematic exploration or investigation designed to generate or contribute to generalizable knowledge.

**Research Evidence:** Empirical findings generated from the systematic and rigorous application of methods and analyses to help answer a question, hypothesis, or topical investigation.

**State Agency:** Any department, commission, council, board, bureau, committee, institution of higher education, agency, or other governmental unit of the executive, legislative, or judicial branch of the state government.

**Steps to Building Evidence:** Colorado's iterative five-step framework that supports stakeholders in identifying the most appropriate questions and methods to contribute to the best available research evidence for a practice or policy.

**Theory of Change:** Also called a conceptual model, a narrative or visual representation that articulates the logic/rationale behind why and how a practice or policy is expected to lead to a change in the desired outcomes. A theory of change is causal and at the systems level. A theory of change should be developed before assessing the implementation or outcomes of a practice or policy. Impact evaluation can support testing of the theory of change.

**Unintended Consequences:** Outcomes, either positive or negative, of a practice or policy that are not intended or foreseen. For example, the cobra effect happens when governments try to eradicate pests (e.g., snakes or rodents) by providing a bounty on their skin or their tail. However, infestations increase when people begin farming the animals for the bounty.

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