



Where do I find quality research and evidence?

Finding quality research and evidence can be challenging when you don't know where to look, how to conduct a search or have limited time and resources to do a thorough search. This Factsheet provides useful information on where to find quality research and evidence and some tips on how to conduct a search.

Accessing quality research and evidence

Quality research and evidence-based information resources are available from a number of sources. These include DCJ published reports, research databases and electronic collections, and the internet.

DCJ published reports

You can find a number of DCJ published reports here:

- [FACS Insights, Analysis and Research \(FACSIAR\) publications](#) which includes full and short summaries of child, family and community related analysis and research reports.
- The [Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research \(BOSCAR\) publications](#) which provides full and short summaries of crime and criminal justice related analysis and research reports.

How can I access research databases and electronic collections?



You can only access research databases through a workplace or academic library. If you don't have access, try [Google Scholar](#).

Research databases & electronic collections

Databases provide access to the most current and authoritative research on a topic by way of full text journal articles and book chapters, conference proceedings and dissertations. Most databases also enable researchers to limit searches to scholarly journals that are peer-reviewed or refereed.

You can search databases on your chosen topic and locate full text articles, abstracts of articles or citations. No single database contains all the works on a particular subject or issue.

The following databases are a good place to start.

- [MEDLINE](#), [CINAHL](#) and [Ageline](#)
- [Psychology & Behavioral Sciences Collection](#)
- [PsycINFO](#) - [PsycARTICLES](#), [PsycBOOKS](#) and [PsycEXTRA](#),
- [SocINDEX with Full Text](#)
- [Science Direct](#)
- [Business Source Complete](#) and [Health Business Elite](#)

Internet resources

In other cases, you might want to search online for a brief review of a topic or for a practical resource. Resources often need to be found quickly and need to be accurate and reliable sources of information. Other credible sources include open access journals, university-affiliated organisations and government websites.

A Google search of a topic is likely to identify sources that vary in quality and in relevance to the topic. There are several questions you can ask when considering the quality of any resource, especially those you find on the web.

- Who has written the information?
- Who has published it?
- Are they a trustworthy source of information?
- Are they trying to persuade me or sell me something?
- When was the information last updated?

Search engines allow you to search the World Wide Web in order to locate and access web resources. Search engines collect and index websites differently. Google has become the favoured search engine for web users, however in order to retrieve quality resources from the World Wide Web you should use a range of search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo. Do not rely on any one particular search engine.

What is a Boolean search?

Boolean search is a type of search allowing users to combine keywords with modifiers such as AND, NOT and OR to refine results.

Search engines through their advanced searching facilities allow you to apply Boolean search principles in order to focus your searches as well as the ability to limit results by material type, date, and domain. Always use advanced search facilities to construct your search.

Within the results of a web search, beware of sponsored pages – these are pages that are essentially marketing or advertising tools or webpages, where the information may be written with a considerable amount of bias.

It is important to critically evaluate websites when using the web as a research tool. Things to look for when evaluating a website include:

- The type of website – where is the information coming from?

- .edu – Educational institutions (.ac for NZ and UK)
- .asn– Association websites
- .gov – Government websites (.govt for NZ)
- .org- Organisation websites
- Source of the information, or who published the website. Read the “About Us” or “Bio” details.
- The currency of the information – when was the website last updated?
- Verifiable information – ensure the information presented on the website can be verified. Are references cited? Is there a link to the cited resource?
- Objectivity – what is the tone of the content of the webpage, is there a minimum amount of bias in the written content?
- Coverage – what are the topics that are covered on the website? To what depth and extent are they treated?

Web pages can be moved or altered, so it is important to cite your pages correctly, including the date the site was visited and the last date the site was updated.

Web Portals or Clearinghouse sites collect websites and documents, usually focused on a subject area, which meet a set of selection criteria and provide a single entry point to a group of quality information resources, such as:

[SSRN](#): the Social Science Research Network provides a single point to access recent research in the Social Sciences through a group of small specialised networks.

[Analysis and Policy Observatory \(formerly Australian Policy Online\)](#): provides access to resources on Australian social, cultural and political research. Staff are able to subscribe to a weekly alert for new material added to the website.

[Social Care Online](#): An online database of information on all aspects of social work and social care in the United Kingdom. It includes legislation, government documents, practice and guidance, systematic reviews, research briefings, UK grey (informally-published) literature, books and journal articles.

[Child Welfare Information Gateway](#): An information service of the United States’ [Children's Bureau](#), Administration for Children and Families, providing access to publications, websites, databases, and online learning tools for improving child welfare practice, including resources that can be shared with families.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) [Indigenous Australians](#) section (formerly the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse): The collection is drawn from library resources held by the AIHW and the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Links are provided to online documents where these are available. Other items may be borrowed via interlibrary loan through your local library.

[HUD](#): The US Housing and Urban Development [USER Bibliographic Database](#) contains more than 10,000 full-abstract citations to research reports, articles, books, monographs and data sources in housing policy, building technology, economic development, urban planning,

and a host of other relevant fields. [Current housing and urban development publications](#) and [Data Sets](#) are also available from the website.

What research and evidence do you want to find?

Searching for evidence-based research is easier if you have worked out what you are looking for, considered the concepts or issues that need to be investigated and put them into a question or statement of issues. Developing a question or statement will allow you to identify the key concepts and the search terms which can be applied to your database search.

Formulating a search plan

A search plan will assist you to:

- clarify the information you are searching for
- provide clues to the resources where the information can be found
- provide structure to your information seeking
- provide a checklist or steps for you to work through.

Before starting your research, breakdown your question or problem into keywords or topics. These keywords will then become the search terms you will use when you conduct your search. When constructing a list of search terms, include synonyms and alternate spelling.

How do I conduct a search for research?

Enter your search terms within the search boxes provided by the database, website or library you are searching. Use connectors and truncation to refine your search for better results.

Example:

You want to find out more about why rough sleepers do not access crisis and long term housing assistance and are unable to remain in housing when stable housing has been secured.

Search terms: street homeless, unsheltered homeless, sleeping rough, rough sleeper and housing assistance

This search list includes words commonly used to describe rough sleepers in Australia, the US and the UK so research from all of these countries will be located.

The search could look like this:

“street homeless” OR “unsheltered homeless” OR “rough sleep*”

AND “housing assistance” OR assistance

- use OR to broaden your search so results have either one or both search terms within
- use AND to connect terms so results have both terms in the same record

- use truncation to search for variations of a search term; for example, “rough sleep*” will search for rough sleepers and rough sleeping.

Useful resources

The guide on [Literature reviews](#) from the University of Melbourne provides an overview of how to select literature for review, and some tips for constructing a literature review around the context of your research question.

For an example of the advice that the Department of Communities and Justice provides to its partner organisations on finding and applying evidence on a specialised area, see the guide on [finding evidence to support the Targeted Earlier Intervention program](#).

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