



# Making Sure That Evidence Is Understood and Used: Engaging With the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality in Evidence Reviews

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## Why Engage With AHRQ?

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) wants to engage with organizations to promote the use of evidence and help improve health outcomes. At some point, everyone will be faced with making a health care-related decision for themselves or someone else. Your engagement can help AHRQ make sure that the evidence can be used and understood.

AHRQ Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) evidence reviews are publicly available and may be used to support and inform activities, such as the development of clinical practice guidelines, policies, and translation materials. Engaging with AHRQ may improve the ability to focus evidence reviews on the issues that are important to your members.

## What is AHRQ?

AHRQ is the lead Federal agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that is charged with improving the quality, safety, efficiency, and effectiveness of health care for all Americans.

## What is the EPC Program?

The vision for AHRQ's EPC Program is that all health care decisions are based on the best available evidence, resulting in the best possible health outcomes. The EPC Program funds 9 EPCs across the United States to conduct rigorous, comprehensive evidence reviews of the scientific literature. These reviews focus on a variety of clinical, behavioral, economic, and other issues.

In order to improve health outcomes, the EPC Program provides research that is relevant, useful, and accessible to health care decisionmakers, including clinicians, health systems, policymakers, consumers, and other stakeholders. The EPC program engages with private and public organizations throughout the evidence review development process.





## How Can Organizations Engage With AHRQ?

There are multiple opportunities to provide input during the evidence review development process:

Opportunity	Specific Role/Activity	How to Do This?
<b>Suggest a Topic for a Future Evidence Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do you need evidence on a specific topic? If so, you can nominate topics for evidence reviews that are relevant to your real-world health care decisions</li><li>• When you nominate a topic, you will need to provide information about the importance of the topic being proposed, who is affected by the issue, and specific questions that research could help answer</li><li>• AHRQ reviews all suggested topics according to its selection criteria</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Suggest topics and get more information at <a href="https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/get-involved/suggest-topic">https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/get-involved/suggest-topic</a></li><li>• Get more information on the criteria AHRQ uses to select a topic at <a href="https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/about/epc/nomination/">https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/about/epc/nomination/</a></li></ul>
<b>Help Refine a Topic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You can help AHRQ refine, or focus, an in-progress report on the most important issues by participating in one or more 1-hour calls to provide input on the draft Key Questions for an evidence review.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contact <a href="mailto:EPC@ahrq.hhs.gov">EPC@ahrq.hhs.gov</a></li></ul>
<b>Provide Feedback on the Draft Evidence Review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You can provide feedback on draft evidence reviews during the public comment periods or as an expert peer reviewer</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sign up for automatic email updates of when drafts are available for public comment at <a href="https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/email-updates">https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/email-updates</a></li><li>• Contact <a href="mailto:EPC@ahrq.hhs.gov">EPC@ahrq.hhs.gov</a></li></ul>
<b>Disseminate the Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• You can share final evidence reviews with others via links on your Web site, assist in writing a brief newsletter item, or simply email the report to others who may be interested</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find existing reports at <a href="https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/">https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/</a></li><li>• Sign up for automatic email updates of when reports are complete at <a href="https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/email-updates">https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/email-updates</a></li><li>• Contact <a href="mailto:EPC@ahrq.hhs.gov">EPC@ahrq.hhs.gov</a></li></ul>

# Additional Details About Engaging With the AHRQ EPC Program

## Who Does the EPC Program Want To Engage With?

Health care decisions affect everyone, and the EPC Program wants to get their input so that its reports can be used and understood. Involving various stakeholders also increases transparency in the research process, which is critical for maintaining the scientific integrity and credibility of AHRQ’s work. Finally, once research is produced, it is hoped that involved stakeholders are more likely to actively use and disseminate the information that they helped produce. Some examples of stakeholders that the AHRQ EPC Program wants to engage with include:

Clinicians and their professional associations	Clinicians are at the heart of medical decisionmaking. Where is lack of good data about diagnostic or treatment choices causing the most harm to patients? What information is needed to make better recommendations to patients? What evidence is required to support guidelines or practice pathways that would improve the quality of care?
Health systems	Many health care decisions are structured by the choices of institutional health care providers, and institutional health care providers often have a broader view of what is causing problems. What information would support better decisions at an institutional level to improve health outcomes?
Purchasers and payers, such as employers and public and private insurers	Coverage by public or private purchasers of health care plays a large role in shaping individual decisions about diagnostic and treatment choices. Where does unclear or conflicting evidence make the decision of what to pay for difficult? Where is new technology or new uses of technology raising questions about what is standard of care? What research is or could be funded?
Health care policymakers at the Federal, State and local levels	Policymakers at all levels want to make health care decisions based on the best available evidence on what works well and what doesn't. Evidence reviews can help decisionmakers plan public health programs, design health insurance coverage, and initiate wellness or advocacy programs that provide people with the best possible information about different health care treatment options.
Consumers, patients, caregivers, and patient advocacy organizations	It is vital that research answer the questions of greatest importance to those experiencing the situation that the research addresses. Which aspects of an illness are of most concern? Which features of a treatment make the most difference? Which kind of presentation of research results is easiest to understand and act upon?





## What Are Evidence Reviews Exactly? And, What Kind of Evidence Reviews Does the EPC Program Produce?

Evidence reviews summarize and synthesize existing literature. They use a rigorous, systematic research process that adheres to explicit, scientific methods. These methods are designed to reduce bias and allow researchers to synthesize large amounts of information from different sources. Two common types of evidence reviews include:

### ◆ **Systematic Reviews**

Systematic reviews are summaries of available scientific evidence that compare the benefits and harms of treatment options. Systematic reviews are designed to provide decisionmakers with accurate, independent, scientifically rigorous information for comparing the effectiveness and safety of various health care options. Systematic reviews have become a foundation for decision making in clinical practice and health policy because they provide more reliable and less biased answers than individual studies.

### ◆ **Technical Briefs**

A technical brief explains what is known—and what is not known—about new or emerging health care tests or treatments. Technical briefs provide an overview of issues related to emerging technologies or clinical interventions. Technical briefs generally focus on interventions for which there is limited published information, or too few studies to support definitive conclusions. The briefs provide objective descriptions of the state of the science, potential frameworks for assessing the applications, implications of the interventions, summaries of ongoing research, and identification of future informational needs.

## How Can AHRQ EPC Reports be Used?

AHRQ's reports are used by clinicians, health care systems, policymakers including Federal agencies, and others who need and want to use evidence for their decisionmaking. Some examples of how AHRQ evidence reviews can be used include:

- ◆ Clinicians and their professional organizations, health systems, and other public- and private-sector organizations may use research reviews to develop clinical practice guidelines, performance measures, educational materials, and quality or operational improvement tools
- ◆ Clinicians may use evidence reviews to evaluate health care options, initiate discussions with their patients, and deliver high-quality, evidence-based care
- ◆ Payers and insurers may use evidence reviews to inform benefit and coverage decisions
- ◆ Policymakers, including Federal agencies, can use evidence reviews to inform and guide program planning and future funding opportunities
- ◆ Consumers can use evidence reviews to evaluate health care options and be actively involved in their health care decisions

## What Types of Questions Can an Evidence Review Answer?

Evidence reviews are designed to answer specific questions. A well-formulated question is one that helps guide the research and can be addressed by a review of the evidence. Questions inappropriate for evidence reviews include those that involve clinical judgment, seek specific recommendations, are vague or limited to a single procedure, or that ask about general approaches to treatment.

The following examples are listed to illustrate the difference between questions that are considered “appropriate” or “inappropriate” for evidence reviews. Examples are listed for clinical questions, as well as the organization and delivery of health care.

### ✓ *Use questions that ask about indications for multiple procedures*

<b>Inappropriate</b>	What are the appropriate indications for arthroscopic surgery?
<b>Appropriate</b>	Does arthroscopic surgery improve [certain outcomes] for [certain types of] patients?
<b>Appropriate</b>	For what types of patients is there strong evidence that arthroscopic surgery improves [certain outcomes]?

### ✓ *Ask questions that are specific about effectiveness and evidence*

<b>Inappropriate</b>	Can the [test Y] be used as a screening for hypertension?
<b>Appropriate</b>	How effective is the [test Y] as a screening for hypertension?

### ✓ *Be specific about the aspect of health care that is of interest*

<b>Inappropriate</b>	What are the effects on health care of defined contribution models?
<b>Appropriate</b>	How does the utilization of previously covered health care services change when employers offer defined contribution models to their employees?

### ✓ *Ask questions that are specific to reviewing available evidence*

<b>Inappropriate</b>	Should patients with severe mental illness be placed in community-based care or treated in inpatient settings?
<b>Appropriate</b>	What is the evidence that placing patients with severe mental illness in community-based care yields the same or better access, effectiveness [on certain outcomes], and costs compared to placement in inpatient treatment settings?

### ✓ *Ask questions that will provide a basis for determining relative performance*

<b>Inappropriate</b>	Do high-volume hospitals provide superior cardiac care?
<b>Appropriate</b>	Are physicians practicing at academic medical centers or hospitals designated as “centers of excellence” for cardiac care more likely than other acute care hospitals to provide beta blockers to patients who have had heart attacks?





In addition to the questions, evidence reviews use additional criteria to guide and focus the review of existing literature, such as the Patient, Intervention, Comparison, Outcomes, Treatment, and Setting [PICO(TS)]. These criteria specify what types of studies are included and excluded from the evidence reviews. This is important to consider so that you can make sure the evidence review will serve your needs.

**Patient, Population or Problem:**

- ◆ The “**P**” in **PICO(TS)** is a description of the patient(s) of interest. It includes the condition(s), populations or sub-populations, disease severity or stage, co-morbidities, and other patient characteristics or demographics.

**Intervention or exposure:**

- ◆ The “**I**” in **PICO(TS)** refers to the specific treatments or approaches with the patient or population. It includes doses, frequency, methods of administering treatments, etc.

**Comparison:**

- ◆ The “**C**” in **PICO(TS)** describes what is being compared with the intervention described above. It includes alternatives such as placebo, drugs, surgery, lifestyle changes, etc.

**Outcome:**

- ◆ The “**O**” in **PICO(TS)** describes the specific results of interest. It refers to short, intermediate, and long-term outcomes, and includes specific areas such as quality of life, complications, mortality, morbidity, etc.

**Timing (if applicable):**

- ◆ The “**T**” in **PICO(TS)** describes the duration of time that is of interest for the particular patient outcome, benefit, or harm to occur (or not occur).

**Setting (if applicable):**

- ◆ The “**S**” in **PICO(TS)** describes the setting or context of interest. Setting can be a location (such as primary, specialty, or inpatient care), or health policy that frames or restricts the important questions to be answered.

**How Can I Learn More?**

**Resources:**

- ◆ EPC Program Main Web site
  - <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov>
- ◆ Propose a Topic for Evidence Review
  - <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/get-involved/suggest-topic>
- ◆ Sign up for the EPC Program Listserv
  - <https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/email-updates>

**Contact for More Information:**

[EPC@ahrq.hhs.gov](mailto:EPC@ahrq.hhs.gov)



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