

AHRQ's Evidence-based Practice Center Program

Synthesizing evidence to improve health care practice and delivery

EPC Program Methods for Systematic Reviews

What is the Evidence-based Practice Center Program?

The vision for AHRQ's Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) Program is that all health care decisions are based on the best available evidence, resulting in the best possible health outcomes. To help achieve this, 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.

EPC evidence reviews are publicly available and may be used to support and inform health care decisionmaking and the development of clinical practice guidelines, policies, and translation materials. The EPC Program works with stakeholders, such as clinicians, patients/consumers, and policymakers, to improve the relevance, and usefulness of the reviews.

How does the EPC Program conduct reviews?

The EPC Program uses its established "Methods Guide for Effectiveness and Comparative Effectiveness Reviews". The Guide, consistent with the 2011 Institute of Medicine (now National Academy of Medicine) standards for systematic reviews,¹ promotes consistency, transparency, and scientific rigor.

Some issues covered by the Guide include:

Issue	Guide Chapter (s)
Identifying and selecting topics for systematic review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Identifying, Selecting and Refining Topics for Comparative Effectiveness Systematic Reviews◆ Developing and Selecting Topic Nominations for Systematic Reviews
Developing the review scope and review protocol with user and stakeholder input	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ The Refinement of Topics for Systematic Reviews: Lessons and Recommendations From the Effective Health Care Program
Systematically locating, screening, and selecting relevant studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Finding Evidence for Comparing Medical Interventions◆ Finding Grey Literature Evidence and Assessing for Outcome and Analysis Reporting Biases When Comparing Medical Interventions: AHRQ and the Effective Health Care Program◆ Avoiding Bias in Selecting Studies◆ Selecting Observational Studies for Comparing Medical Interventions
Abstracting data and appraising risk of bias in the individual studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Assessing the Risk of Bias of Individual Studies in Systematic Reviews of Health Care Interventions◆ Assessing Harms When Comparing Medical Interventions◆ Using Existing Systematic Reviews to Replace De Novo Processes in CERs



Issue	Guide Chapter (s)
Synthesizing and interpreting findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Conducting Quantitative Synthesis When Comparing Medical Interventions: AHRQ and the Effective Health Care Program ◆ Expanded Guidance on Selected Quantitative Synthesis Topics ◆ Handling Continuous Outcomes in Quantitative Synthesis ◆ Assessing Harms When Comparing Medical Interventions ◆ Integrating Bodies of Evidence: Existing Systematic Reviews and Primary Studies
Assessing the quality and applicability of the overall body of evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Grading the Strength of a Body of Evidence When Assessing Health Care Interventions for the Effective Health Care Program of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: An Update ◆ Assessing the Applicability of Studies When Comparing Medical Interventions
Updating systematic reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Updating Comparative Effectiveness Reviews: Current Efforts in AHRQ's Effective Health Care Program

The EPC Program also supports research on complex methodological issues in systematic evidence reviews. Areas of interest include complex interventions; tools to improve the efficiency of reviews, such as the Systematic Review Data Repository; and synthesis methods.

More details about EPC Program methods are available at:

- ◆ **Methods Guide for Effectiveness and Comparative Effectiveness Reviews**
<http://www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/topics/cer-methods-guide/overview>
 - Presents issues key to the development of systematic reviews and describes recommended approaches for addressing difficult, frequently encountered methodological issues.
- ◆ **Methods Guide for Medical Test Reviews**
<http://www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/topics/methods-guidance-tests/overview-2012>
 - Applies the same principles for assessing treatments to issues and challenges in assessing medical tests, and highlights areas where different qualities of medical tests necessitate a different or variation of the approach to systematic review compared to a review on treatments.
- ◆ **Training Modules**
https://effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/search/?search_api_views_fulltext=training+modules
- ◆ **EPC Program Web site**
<https://www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/>

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¹Institute of Medicine. Finding What Works in Health Care: Standards for Systematic Reviews (Report Brief). 2011. www.iom.edu/Reports/2011/Finding-WhatWorks-in-Health-Care-Standards-for-Systematic-Reviews/Report-Brief.aspx.

