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Evidence-based Practice Centers

Synthesizing scientific evidence to improve quality and effectiveness in health care

Under the Evidence-based Practice Centers (EPC) Program of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (formerly the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research—AHCPR), 5-year contracts are awarded to institutions in the United States and Canada to serve as EPCs. The EPCs review all relevant scientific literature on clinical, behavioral, and organization and financing topics to produce evidence reports and technology assessments. These reports are used for informing and developing coverage decisions, quality measures, educational materials and tools, guidelines, and research agendas. The EPCs also conduct research on methodology of systematic reviews.

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Overview

In 1997, the Agency for Health Care Policy and Research (AHCPR), now known as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), launched its initiative to promote evidence-based practice in everyday care through establishment of the Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) Program. The EPCs develop evidence reports and technology assessments on topics relevant to clinical and other health care organization and delivery issues;—specifically those that are common, expensive, and/or significant for the Medicare and Medicaid populations. With this program, AHRQ became a "science partner" with private and public organizations in their efforts to improve the quality, effectiveness, and appropriateness of health care by synthesizing the evidence and facilitating the translation of evidence-based research findings. Topics are nominated by non-federal partners such as professional societies, health plans, insurers, employers, and patient groups.

Go to <http://www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov/index.cfm/submit-a-suggestion-for-research/> for the topic nomination procedures. Federal partners often request evidence reports and should contact the EPC Program Director for more information.

The Effective Health Care (EHC) Program, which was created from the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act (MMA) of 2003, sponsors new research, systematic reviews, and the translation and dissemination of research findings to a variety of audiences, including clinicians, consumers, and policymakers. Within the Effective Health Care (EHC) Program, EPCs conduct Comparative Effectiveness Reviews, Effectiveness Reviews, Technical Briefs and Future Research Needs reports, focused on patient-centered outcomes.

The reports conducted under the purview of the EHC Program can be found at: <http://www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov>. Documents for review and public comment as well as other methods projects may also be found on the EHC Web site.

One of the unique aspects of the EHC Program is the involvement of a diverse range of stakeholders throughout the research process to ensure relevancy and transparency. Collaboration with a broad range of health care stakeholders is a cornerstone of AHRQ's research. AHRQ firmly believes that involving all stakeholders in the research enterprise from the beginning improves the end product and facilitates the diffusion and implementation of the research findings by ensuring that they reflect the various needs of all diverse users, are relevant to their unique challenges, and are applicable in real-world situations.

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Centers

In August 2012, AHRQ announced the fourth award of 5-year contracts for EPC-IV to 11 Evidence-based Practice Centers to continue the work performed by the previous group of EPCs.

EPCs conduct technology assessments for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Go to: <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/techix.htm> for more information.

EPCs support the work of the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF). Go to: <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/uspstfix.htm> for more information.

EPCs conduct systematic reviews in the form of comparative effectiveness reviews and technical briefs for the Effective Health Care Program. Go to: <http://www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov> for more information.

The current EPCs are located at:

- Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, Technology Evaluation Center.
- Brown University
- ECRI Institute—Penn Medicine.
- Johns Hopkins University.
- Kaiser Permanente Research Affiliates.
- Minnesota Evidence-based Practice Center.
- Pacific Northwest Evidence-based Practice Center—Oregon Health and Science University.
- RTI International—University of North Carolina.
- Southern California.
- University of Alberta.
- Vanderbilt University.

For contacts and additional information about the current participating EPCs, go to: <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/epc/epcenters.htm>.

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Report Development

The EPCs review all relevant scientific literature on clinical, behavioral, and organization and financing topics to produce evidence reports, technical reviews (covering nonclinical methodological topics), and technology assessments.

These reports, reviews, and technology assessments are based on rigorous, comprehensive syntheses and analyses of the scientific literature on topics relevant to clinical, social science/behavioral, economic, and other health care organization and delivery issues. EPC reports and assessments emphasize explicit and detailed documentation of methods, rationale, and assumptions. These scientific syntheses may include meta-analyses and cost analyses. All EPCs collaborate with other medical and research organizations so that a broad range of experts is included in the development process.

The resulting evidence reports and technology assessments are used by Federal and State agencies, private sector professional societies, health delivery systems, providers, payers, and others committed to evidence-based health care.

For a list of available reports by clinical categories and topics, go to: <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/epcindex.htm>

For a numerical list of titles in the Evidence Report Series, go to: <http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/epc/epcseries.htm>

In addition, the EPCs will:

- Provide technical assistance to professional organizations, employers, providers, policymakers, etc. to facilitate translation of the reports into quality improvement tools, evidence-based curricula, and reimbursement policies.
- Undertake methods research.
- Update prior evidence reports.

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Additional Information

AHRQ's Center for Outcomes and Evidence (COE) oversees the Evidence-based Practice Centers Program. For more information about the program contact:

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Current as of November 2012

Internet Citation:

Evidence-based Practice Centers Overview. November 2012. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD.
<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/epc/>



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