# Developing methods guidance for Cochrane Reviews

May 2024

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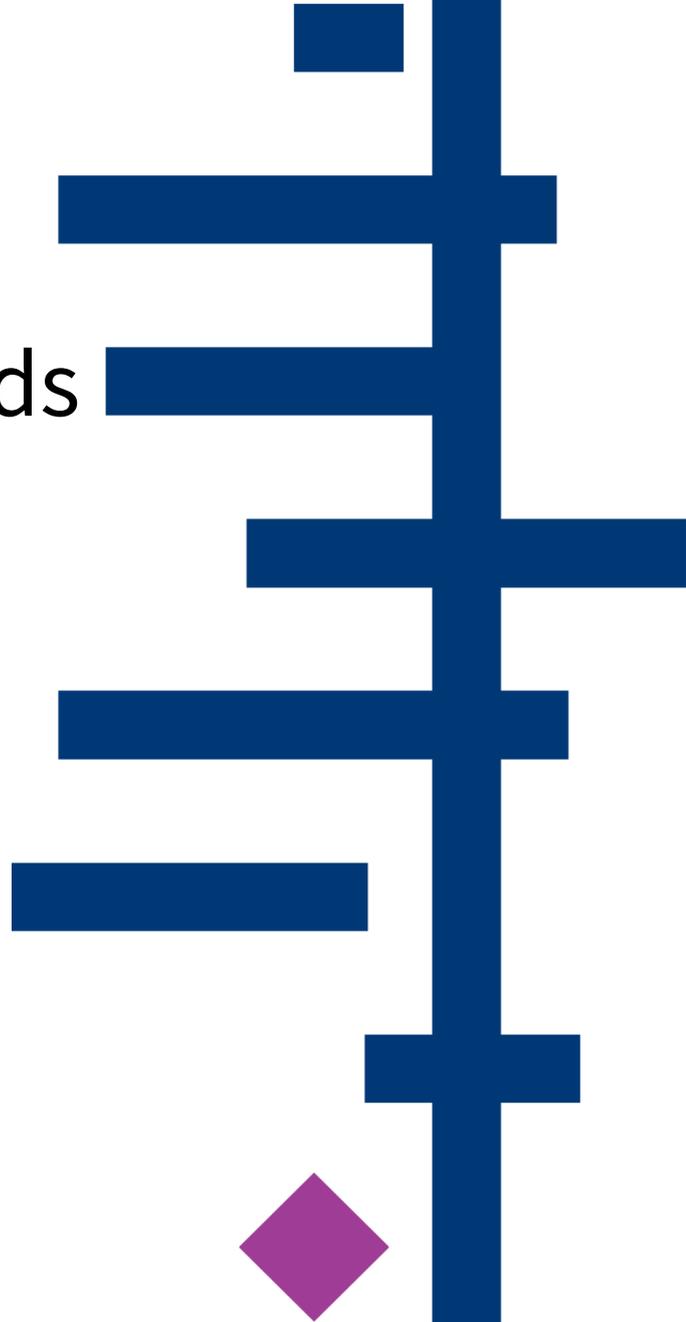
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## 1.1 WHY IS THIS DOCUMENT NEEDED?

Cochrane first published the _Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions_ in 1994 and launched version 6 in October 2019. The _Handbook_ details the methods and expectations for conducting Cochrane reviews of interventions and provides the context and evidence for these recommended methods. Concise Methodological Expectations for Cochrane Intervention Reviews (MECIR) standards are embedded throughout the chapters, and a collated list of all MECIR standards is available as a separate resource.

Intervention reviews remain the most common type of Cochrane review, but other review types, such as diagnostic test accuracy (DTA) systematic reviews, are supported, and new synthesis methods have recently been approved for use in Cochrane Reviews. Non-intervention review types and methods require unique approaches and guidance. The _Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Diagnostic Test Accuracy_ was published in 2023 in its first complete version, led by the Screening and Diagnostic Tests Methods Group, and there is growing interest in guidance about other types of review, such as qualitative evidence synthesis and systematic reviews of prognosis studies.

## 1.2 WHAT WOULD WE LIKE TO ACHIEVE WITH THIS DOCUMENT?

Cochrane aims to provide appropriate methods and guidance for all review types and approaches deemed suitable for use in Cochrane reviews to be published in the Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR). This document outlines our recommendations for the development, organisation, dissemination and maintenance of methods guidance for Cochrane Reviews.

## 1.3 WHO IS THIS DOCUMENT FOR?

_'Developing methods guidance for Cochrane Reviews'_ is primarily for Cochrane Methods Groups whose primary functions are to:

1. Spearhead methods research and development and act as a bridge between Cochrane and the wider research community.
2. Define best practices and ensure that Cochrane guidance for accepted methods is current.
3. Support the implementation of new or amended methods by acting as an advisor or through involvement in the methods implementation project.

Other methodologists and researchers not formally associated with Cochrane Methods Groups are also welcome to propose changes to methods used in Cochrane (see here for more details).

## 1.4 DEVELOPING METHODS GUIDANCE FOR COCHRANE REVIEWS

Individuals or groups looking to develop methods guidance for use in Cochrane Reviews are advised that:

- The proposed methods should be supported by appropriate research evidence.
- All new methods (or tools) need to be submitted to the Cochrane Methods Executive for assessment before Cochrane can endorse them. The Methods Executive´s assessment is a recommendation to the Editor-in-Chief, who decides whether to approve new methods for piloting, scale-up, or full implementation.

We recommend that the evidence supporting new methods is collated into a resource for Cochrane authors and organised in a logical way, i.e. the stages of review production (similar to the *Cochrane Handbook of Systematic Reviews of Interventions*).

We recommend that this resource be available via the leading (or most relevant) Methods Group's website and other relevant websites (i.e. Cochrane Training Website).

## 1.5 PROPOSING A NEW COCHRANE HANDBOOK

When the evidence base for the methods is sufficiently comprehensive, and there is growing demand from authors and CRGs to apply them in Cochrane Reviews, Methods Groups may wish to propose new Cochrane *Handbooks*.

For the proposal of a new *Handbook* to be considered, the following criteria should be met:

- Cochrane *Handbooks* must be led or supported by a registered Cochrane Methods Group.
- At least five pilot Cochrane reviews using the new or adapted method should have been published in the Cochrane Library to test production processes and understand what guidance, tools and training materials are required.
- The *Handbook* team agrees to Cochrane's 'General editorial policies' and other relevant policies from the Editorial and Publishing Policy Resources;
- The *Handbook* team should be able to complete the *Handbook* within a reasonable timeframe.

Proposals for a new *Handbook* will be checked by the Editorial Board, Methods Executive and Cochrane Evidence Production and Methods Directorate and will require approval from the Editor in Chief. During *Handbook* development, liaisons with the Methods Executive, Editorial Board, and the Editor in Chief will be required to ensure the content is suitable for the target audience.

New Cochrane *Handbooks* should initially be developed as a virtual resource, usually hosted on the relevant Methods Group website. The steps for proposing a new *Handbook* to Cochrane are as follows:

1. Interested *Handbook* teams complete the proposal form below.
2. Cochrane Evidence Production and Methods Directorate (EPMD) ensures the *Handbook* proposal is appropriate, and offers suggested amendments, if relevant.
3. Evidence Production and Methods Directorate (EPMD) informs all relevant Cochrane groups of the proposal.

4. *The handbook* proposal is discussed with the Methods Executive and Editorial Board to provide a recommendation to the Editor in Chief.
5. The Editor-in-Chief's decision of whether to reject or pursue the *Handbook* relayed to the *Handbook* team.
6. If successful, the *Handbook* editorial team and the Methods Implementation Editor work together to outline roles, responsibilities, timelines, workflows and support* for developing the *Handbook*.
7. Draft chapters are shared as PDFs via the Methods Group website. If required, see [this example](#).
8. The finalised *Handbook* is hosted by Cochrane Training on their platform. See [this example](#).

*\* Support from Cochrane will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis and could include in-person support from a Managing Editor (position usually filled by the Methods Implementation Editor) and/or Editorial Assistant and/or funding for Editor payments.*

*\*\* Project management documentation and developing chapters should be hosted in a secure Teams/ SharePoint folder to which the Handbook editorial team and Methods Implementation Editor have shared access.*

## 1.6 PROPOSING A HARD COPY FOR A NEW COCHRANE HANDBOOK?

As the content of a virtual *Handbook* develops on the relevant Methods Group's website, Methods Groups may want to propose that it is developed into a hard copy. If the Cochrane Evidence Production and Methods Directorate (EPDM) and Editor-in-Chief approve the proposal, the Methods Implementation Editor will submit it to Cochrane's books series Publisher- see [this example](#).

### Version control

| | |
|---|---|
| Document created: | 9 September 2020 |
| Document last updated: | 30 April 2024 |
| Document version: | 2 |
| Version notes | This document has been updated with information up to 2024 regarding the following issues:<br>1. Update information regarding the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Diagnostic Test Accuracy, published in 2023.<br>2. Update information regarding the Scientific Committee (disbanded in 2023), the Methods Executive and the Evidence Production & Methods Directorate roles when a new handbook is proposed.<br>3. Remove methods@cochrane.org since this email address is disabled.<br>4. Update links to current versions |
| Document author: | Ingrid Arevalo-Rodriguez (Methods Implementation Editor)<br><br>Ella Flemyng (former Methods Implementation Coordinator) |
| Contact for queries: | iarevalo@cochrane.org |
| Acknowledgements: | We thank Julian Higgins and James Thomas, Senior Editors of the *Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions*, for commenting on an early draft of Version 1.<br>The Cochrane Methods Executive informed the development of Version 1 (members of the Executive at that time were Su Golder, Miranda Langendam, Tianjing Li, Jo McKenzie, Carl Moons, Sarah Nevitt, Jane Noyes and Holger Schunemann).<br>This document was approved by the Editor in Chief (Karla Soares Weiser) on 9 September 2020. |

## 1.7 APPENDIX. NEW COCHRANE *HANDBOOK* PROPOSAL FORM

If you are interested in developing a new Cochrane *Handbook*, please complete and send the completed form to [iarevalo@cochrane.org](mailto:iarevalo@cochrane.org).

1. **INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION**
   - i. Main contact for this proposal
   - ii. Main Methods Group behind the proposal.
   - iii. Proposed Handbook Title:
     *If appropriate, in the format 'Cochrane Handbook for XXX'*
   - iv. Names and affiliations of potential Editors
     *Please consider how many Senior Scientific Editors the Handbook might need (generally a maximum of two), and whether it may need Associate Scientific Editor or other types of editors (see Handbook editorial team role descriptions document).*

2. **DESCRIPTION OF HANDBOOK**
   *Please provide a brief overview of the Handbook, Methods Groups or other groups involved and the history of its development to date.*

3. **PROVISIONAL LIST OF CONTENTS**
   *Please provide a provisional list of contents and any key evidence to support the methods. If this has been collated as a resource on a Methods Group's website, please include a link.*

4. **ANY OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION (e.g. Team resources to complete the project)**