

Identifying priorities for systematic reviews relevant to Australian policy makers

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Background

The Cochrane Effective Practice and Organisation of Care (EPOC) Group produces systematic reviews of educational, behavioural, financial, organisational and regulatory interventions to improve professional practice and the organisation of health services. Many of these interventions are implemented at an institutional or health system level. Systematic reviews may assist policy makers' decision-making about such interventions.

Data gathered and methods used

This study aimed to identify priority topics for EPOC systematic reviews of relevance to health policy makers, and to improve understanding of how to increase the use of research in policy. The study was coordinated by the Australian Satellite of the EPOC Group, located within the National Health and Medical Research Council. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 30 senior policy officers representing Departments of Health in each Australian State and Territory. Participants identified issues of importance that could be informed by reviews of the available evidence. They were also asked to discuss the role of research evidence in policy, identifying enablers and barriers. An email survey was used to identify consensus on the prioritised topics.

Results and conclusions

Participants identified priority topics including financial arrangements, governance, access, appropriateness and continuity of care, workforce recruitment and skill mix, health professional practice, service delivery, and information systems. A number of enablers and barriers to the use of evidence were identified. These findings will be used to align the output of the EPOC Group to the research needs of policy makers, and create better strategies to support policy makers in their work.