

Development of a topic nomination and selection process with US Medicaid policy makers

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Background: Medicaid is a US federal-state partnership providing healthcare benefits for low income children and adults. States began collaborating as the Medicaid Evidence-based Decisions (MED) Project to commission evidence reviews for informing policy decisions. Developing a topic nomination and selection process that is responsive to policy makers and results in focused relevant evidence reviews was crucial.

Objective: To describe a topic nomination and selection process and discuss best practices in refining and selecting evidence review topics to inform policy decisions.

Methods: Development of a topic nomination, refinement and selection process by researchers that is timely and sets the research priorities for the MED project.

Results: Topic selection includes three key phases: (1) nomination, (2) scanning and refinement, and (3) ranking and selection. States use a nomination form to describe the topic policy context, intended use of the report, and timeline requirements. MED uses an iterative process to refine the topic nomination with the nominating policy maker. A scan of five clinical evidence sources including the Cochrane Library, and three health policy organizations informs the development of the research protocol and key questions. The nominator and subsequently, the collaborative, must approve the research protocol and key questions before ranking the topics. Each participant ranks every topic on a scale of 1 to 10 and the top ranked topics are selected for an evidence review. The most common topic areas selected have been health services delivery, mental health and behavioral conditions, oral health, and imaging. MED selects 10-12 evidence review topics during each six month selection cycle.

Conclusions: Policy makers have successfully collaborated with researchers to develop an effective topic nomination and selection process. Topic refinement is an iterative process and is the most critical phase for developing a policy relevant evidence review.