

Identifying Important Research Questions

The Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Programme produces independent research on the effectiveness, costs and broader impact of healthcare treatments and tests to meet the needs of those who plan, provide or receive care in the NHS. The breadth of the programme is wide, encompassing:

- health care interventions to promote health and prevent disease
- diagnostic tests or questionnaires
- drug treatments and devices
- interventions such as surgical techniques, physical and talking therapies and rehabilitation.

How are research questions identified?

The programme identifies important research questions by consulting widely with stakeholders within the NHS and NIHR, external organisations representing health professionals and patients and carers and, with policy-makers.

Other important research questions are identified by scanning systematic reviews e.g Cochrane Reviews and a range of literature sources including journals and evidence bulletins.

Why is identification important?

Through the commissioned funding stream, the HTA Programme identifies and prioritises NHS evidence needs and advertises calls for research proposals to address these.

Identifying important research questions to be advertised is a high priority.

- It enables the programme to commission a broad, balanced range of research that meets the needs of the NHS.
- It involves clinicians, policy makers and service users in shaping the research agenda.
- It helps identify and fund research which is important to the NHS but which may not otherwise be funded.

How can you get involved?

We are keen to work with professional and patient groups in identifying important topics for HTA research. There are a number of ways you can get involved.

- If you are a NHS commissioner, please contact us regarding health care treatments and tests for which further evidence of clinical and cost-effectiveness is required.
- If you are a professional or patient group that has developed a research strategy or has identified priorities for research, we would be pleased to advise on topics that may be within the remit for HTA research.
- We would be pleased to hear from any professional or patient groups interested in taking part in an exercise to identify research topics for HTA. This could be a small workshop or an exercise involving a wider membership or network.
- Anyone can submit a suggestion for HTA research. If you have a suggestion, this can be submitted online at www.hta.ac.uk/suggest or by contacting Caroline Whiting:
Email: c.whiting@southampton.ac.uk,
Tel: 02380 595489.



Suggest a topic at www.hta.ac.uk/suggest

What makes a good research question?

A good research question for HTA will be:

- important to the NHS
- focused on patients, clinical outcomes and quality of life
- supported by current evidence (e.g. a systematic review)
- timely, so that the research will continue to be needed following completion of the study
- structured to provide a clear, well defined research question (e.g. using the PICO format).

A well-defined research question can increase the likelihood of research being commissioned by providing a clear insight into the research that is required. PICO is a widely used format for structuring research questions whereby:

P = Patient group

I = Intervention to be researched

C = Comparator against which intervention will be compared

O = Outcome(s) to be measured

An example question in PICO format would be “Are insulin pumps more effective at improving glucose levels than conventional therapies in managing type 2 diabetes in pregnant women?”

While this format is helpful to us, please do not let it deter you from making research suggestions. We are keen to receive your ideas for HTA research in any format. The **minimum** we need you to tell us is the intervention to be researched, the patient group and why the proposed research is important.

Success at a glance

Our work in identifying and prioritising NHS evidence needs has resulted in research that improves clinical and cost-effectiveness and supports policy development, national guidance and decision making.

Some examples of published studies are:

- Pulse oximetry as a screening test for congenital heart defects in newborn infants *Health Technol Assess* 2012;16(2):1–184
- A multicentre randomised controlled trial and economic evaluation of ion-exchange water softeners for the treatment of eczema in children *Health Technol Assess* 2011;15(8):1–156
- A multicentred randomised controlled trial of a primary-care based cognitive behavioural programme for low back pain *Health Technol Assess* 2010;14(41):1–281
- A randomised controlled trial of the use of aciclovir and/or prednisolone for the early treatment of Bell's palsy *Health Technol Assess* 2009;13(47):1–154

Contact us:

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What happens after we receive suggestions?

Suggestions for research are checked to ensure they fall within remit for HTA

‘Overlap’ checks to ensure no similar research is underway or already available

Research suggestions go through a process of prioritisation

Prioritised suggestions go to open advert for research applications