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User involvement in the systematic review process Campbell Collaboration Policy Brief

Background

It is widely acknowledged that user involvement in the systematic review process is important, most notably to ensure that the review findings are credible and useful. Most systematic review guidelines, handbooks and textbooks provide information about the role that users might play and how they might be engaged in the production process.¹⁻⁴

Who is a user?

In the context of The Campbell Collaboration the term user refers to:

- i) people (or their representatives) who receive a service, intervention or programme
- ii) practitioners (e.g social workers, teachers, police officers, doctors)
- iii) policy-makers
- iv) researchers
- v) funders

Generally, this is in line with other organisations producing systematic reviews. For example, the Cochrane Collaboration is committed to user involvement and encourages review authors to seek and incorporate user views (consumers, clinicians, etc).² The Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD) at the University of York, UK uses the term user to refer to any person or group who might potentially use the findings of a review.¹ All systematic reviews produced by CRD have an advisory group, containing a range of users who input at various stages throughout the process. Similarly, the EPPI-centre based at the University of London refers to the importance of user involvement and gives users of services, practitioners, policy makers, researchers, employers and members of the public as examples of users.⁵ Other organisations such as the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE), UK use the term stakeholder to refer to service users and carers, practitioners, policy makers and researchers and recommends ideally that all stakeholder groups be involved in the review process.³

How can users be involved in the systematic review process?

Users have contributed to systematic review production in various ways, for example by identifying and prioritising review topics, defining review questions and important outcomes, conducting reviews, editing review protocols and reports, and disseminating and implementing review findings in practice. Users also contribute in other ways, for example by enhancing scientific quality through discussion about intervention integrity (what type of contamination should reviewers look for) and transferability (external validity).

User involvement in Campbell systematic reviews

User involvement is central to the ten principles governing the production of Campbell systematic reviews:

- *Collaboration*, by internally and externally fostering good communications, open decision-making and teamwork
- Building on the *enthusiasm* of individuals, by involving and supporting people of different skills and backgrounds
- *Avoiding duplication*, by good management and co-ordination to maximise economy of effort
- *Minimising bias*, through a variety of approaches such as scientific rigour, ensuring broad participation, and avoiding conflicts of interest
- *Keeping up to date*, by a commitment to ensure that Campbell Reviews are maintained through identification and incorporation of new evidence
- Striving for *relevance*, by promoting the assessment of interventions using outcomes that matter to people making choices in education, crime and justice, and social welfare
- Promoting *access*, by wide dissemination of the outputs of the Collaboration, engaging potential users of evidence, taking advantage of strategic alliances, and by promoting appropriate prices, content and media to meet the needs of users worldwide
- Ensuring *quality*, by being open and responsive to criticism, applying advances in methodology, and developing systems for quality improvement
- *Continuity*, by ensuring that responsibility for reviews, editorial processes and key functions is maintained and renewed
- Enabling *wide participation* in the work of the Collaboration by reducing barriers to contributing and by encouraging diversity.

To date, user involvement has occurred mainly through the Nordic Campbell Centre (NC2). NC2 has established reference groups for 15 of the Campbell reviews they support financially. User involvement is sought early in the review process and includes a broad range of users.

A spectrum of user involvement in the systematic review process is proposed, ranging from determining the scope of the review and the outcomes of relevance, to determining the need for a review and involvement throughout all stages of production and dissemination. Each of the three co-ordinating groups (Social Welfare, Education and Crime and Justice) will determine the extent of user involvement within their respective groups. The Users group can help in identifying users through its various networks.

User involvement will develop over time, but as a starting point it is recommended that authors establish an 'advisory' or 'user' group to oversee the production process. The advisory group needs to be a manageable size, as input will need to be coordinated to inform key decisions throughout the review process. Generally, the broader the review question the broader the experience required. Terms of reference can be used to ensure clarity about what is required and tasks might include one or more of:

- Refining the review question

- Defining the boundaries for the interventions and populations to be included
- Setting priorities for outcomes to be assessed
- Suggesting important background information that clarifies issues from different perspectives
- Identifying studies for inclusion
- Helping to interpret the findings of the review
- Commenting on the review protocol and draft report
- Contributing to the dissemination plan and helping to disseminate the findings to relevant groups.

References

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