

Incorporating economic evidence in EPOC reviews

Resource use (cost) is nearly always, if not always, a consideration when deciding about health system interventions. Consequently, review authors should generally include resource use as an outcome in EPOC reviews.

When possible, important items or categories of resource use should be specified in the protocol and reported. This might include, for example, length of hospital stay in days, number of outpatient attendances, number of days off work, direct medical resource use, patient out-of-pocket expenses.

Data regarding outcomes that reflect resource use in included studies should be extracted in the same way as other outcomes, including an assessment of the risk of bias. Resource use, either combined or for specific types of resource use, should be considered for inclusion in a Summary of Findings table, along with other important outcomes.¹ So as not to overwhelm decision-makers with multiple outcomes, it may be desirable to summarise evidence for specific types of resource use in a separate table and then to include a combined measure of resource use (presented as costs or expenditures, valued appropriately in a standard currency) in a Summary of Findings table.

When outcomes reporting resource use are not reported in included studies, it may be possible, nonetheless, for review authors to identify and report key components of the intervention and outcomes that have implications for resource use. For example, these might include requirements for human resources, training, equipment and supplies for the intervention; or savings due to a reduction in morbidity. Review authors should follow the guidance from the Campbell and Cochrane Economic Methods Group (CCEMG) with respect to reporting resource use and cost data. This guidance is reported in Chapter 15 of the [Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions](#),² with further practical guidance and materials available on the CCEMG website (<http://methods.cochrane.org/economics/welcome>).

A critical review of health economics studies is generally beyond the scope of an EPOC review. Review authors wanting to include health economic studies must specify this in the protocol and include an appropriate plan, including specification of the types of health economics studies that will be included, search strategies, data extraction, analysis and presentation of the results (Chapter 15 of the [Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions](#)). In some circumstances a reviewer might want to consider incorporating a brief economic commentary into their review. This allows basic economic evidence to be incorporated into the background and discussion sections of a Cochrane intervention review. Full details of recommended methods for incorporating a critical review of health economics or a brief economic commentary are available on the CCEMG website (<http://methods.cochrane.org/economics/welcome>).

¹ Brunetti M, Shemilt I, Pregno S, Vale L, Oxman AD, Lord J et al.. GRADE guidelines: 10. Considering resource use and rating the quality of economic evidence. *J Clin Epidemiol.* 2013; 66(2):140-50