



Cochrane Thematic Groups – Application guidelines June 2022

Introduction

Cochrane's vision is *a world of better health for all people where decisions about health and care are informed by high-quality evidence*. Cochrane has embarked on a major change programme to deliver that vision - our [Strategy for Change](#) - and ensure we continue to be relevant and responsive to global health and care needs. Central to this are our plans to transform the way we produce the high-quality, independent and timely evidence that stakeholders need.

Cochrane will implement a [new model of producing evidence](#) that consists of three components:

1. Evidence Synthesis Units
2. Thematic Groups
3. Central Editorial Service

No single component of the new model can bring about the change needed to guarantee Cochrane's future. Each component is part of an ecosystem, and will rely on and interact with the other elements, all of which must be underpinned by the four enabling objectives from our [Strategy for Change](#):

- **Improved efficiency:** make use of existing content and methodological expertise, engage fully with Cochrane processes, and technology to ensure that our content is consistently relevant, timely, and of high quality;
- **Increased sustainability:** encourage and support investment from a diverse range of funders;
- **Increased awareness and impact:** embrace innovations that allow Cochrane to diversify the types of products we deliver and make them accessible to all;
- **Enhanced accountability:** have clearer lines of accountability to ensure performance standards are met, and that all those engaged within Cochrane understand their roles and responsibilities.

Access to global expertise in a wide range of topic areas is one element that sets the development of Cochrane evidence syntheses apart. Cochrane Thematic Groups will form a vital part of the ecosystem because they offer a way to preserve the wealth of topic and methodological expertise and the stakeholder relationships that exist within current Cochrane Groups.

The aim is for Thematic Groups to be forward-looking, responsive to the needs of our beneficiaries, and to help us deliver on our four [Strategy for Change](#) key principles:

- **Collaboration:** ensure we maintain the global collaboration that underpins the value of Cochrane reviews;
- **Relevance:** ensure the evidence we produce addresses priority issues for the world, and so maximizes our impact on global health;
- **Integrity:** be clear about why we prioritize topics, and avoid becoming subject to vested interests;
- **Quality:** maintain and extend our reputation for providing the best evidence for global health questions through prioritization and focus.

While Cochrane is transitioning to the new model, Thematic Groups will be set up for a **maximum of five years**, with an opportunity to review Group performance at the three-year mark.

Thematic areas

Decisions about the broad thematic areas on which Cochrane should focus on is still being discussed, but we are clear that we need to align Cochrane's global challenges framework with the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals as much as possible. Initially, we have identified 12 broad topic areas in collaboration with members of Cochrane Editorial Board. These were selected with respect to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (particularly Goal 3 *Good Health and Well-being*), or the World Health Organization (WHO) Burden of Disease, and to maintain expertise in some key areas. These topic areas are:

- Acute and emergency care
- Cancer
- Cardiovascular
- End of life care
- Head and neck
- Health equity
- Health ageing
- Infectious diseases and global emergencies
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Nutrition and physical activities
- Public health and health systems
- Women and children's health

The goal is to set up approximately 20 Thematic Groups on priority topic areas that are relevant to Cochrane's stakeholders. The aim is to complete this process within the next year in collaboration with the Cochrane community.

In the first phase of implementation an **initial cohort of no more than six Thematic Groups** will be selected based on the criteria described below. Applications in any **priority** topic area are welcome. If an application is not in one of the 12 topics areas shown above, please justify how the Thematic Group is aligned with the mission and vision of the organization. A complete list of all priority topic areas will be shared when it is fully defined.

Benefits and responsibilities

Establishing a Cochrane Thematic Group entails certain key benefits and responsibilities:

Benefits

- The right to operate under the Cochrane global brand
- The potential for the Cochrane Central Executive Team to provide fundraising support once a central fundraising team is in place
- Access to specialist training and development opportunities
- Access to resources to support capacity building, knowledge translation and dissemination activities
- Limited administrative support while the Group is being established.
- For Thematic Groups that choose to develop evidence syntheses:

- access to Cochrane’s expert Methods community and cutting-edge evidence synthesis methodology innovations;
- use of integrated systems and platforms designed to support and streamline evidence synthesis (these will evolve and improve to support the new model);
- access to a Fast Track editorial service for high-priority evidence syntheses;
- a publishing route to the prestigious Cochrane Library; this publication is already 75% open access and will be fully open access by 2025;
- translation of Plain language summaries into key languages for some reviews.

Responsibilities

- Uphold Cochrane’s key principles – collaboration, relevance, integrity, and quality – in all aspects of Thematic Group management.
- Recruit suitably qualified staff, at a level appropriate to deliver on all objectives, and complete all activities to a high standard.
- Provide topic expertise (clinical and lived experience) to Evidence Synthesis Units and the Central Editorial Service.
- For Thematic Groups that choose to develop evidence syntheses:
 - use Cochrane’s standard authoring tools and processes;
 - adhere to Cochrane’s editorial policies;
 - submit all manuscripts to Cochrane’s Central Editorial Service;
 - use Cochrane’s existing infrastructure systems for study identification (e.g., the Cochrane Register of Studies, semi-automation with Cochrane Crowd and machine learning).

Application guidelines

Applications for Thematic Groups will be considered by the Editor in Chief, and a panel with members drawn from the Editorial Board and externally. All panel members must declare any potential conflicts of interest and the list of panelists will be shared with the Cochrane Future of Evidence Synthesis Oversight Committee (convened on behalf of the Governing Board). Any complaints about the decision-making process will be referred to the Cochrane Future of Evidence Synthesis Oversight Committee.

Participants

Applications to set up a Thematic Group can be made by any current Cochrane members. This includes, but is not limited to, members of Cochrane Review Groups, Fields, Geographic Groups and Methods Groups. Applications based on collaboration between existing Cochrane groups will be particularly welcome.

Funding

The leaders of Cochrane Thematic Groups will be responsible for identifying suitable funding for their activities and should provide information about potential or confirmed funding options as part of the formal application process. The Cochrane Central Executive Team will aim to provide administrative and fundraising support subject to budget approval and the establishment of a central fundraising team.

Leadership and governance

Thematic Groups would be responsible for identifying a leader(s) or a leadership team, and for ensuring robust leadership structures are in place, including accountability to the Cochrane Governing Board. Work is underway to establish a formal mechanism to set out responsibilities and accountabilities for each Thematic Group and the central team.

The Thematic Group leader(s) must ensure overall capacity and ability to recruit, supervise and direct resources in a way that supports their activities, to ensure that the group functions as a single unit and creates strategic partnerships with other Cochrane Groups (Fields, Geographic Groups, Methods Groups, etc.). Applications should also address the issues of rotational leadership and succession planning, where appropriate.

Application process and criteria

An application template is available on the [Future of Evidence Synthesis webpage](#). This template should be completed and uploaded using an online submission form, available on the same webpage. Further information about timelines is shown below.

Thematic Groups will have core (mandatory) activities that they will be required to undertake and may also wish to undertake other highly desirable activities (Table 1).

Table 1. List of activities for Thematic Groups

Activity	Mandatory	Highly desirable
Contribute leadership and content expertise to identify priorities for producing Cochrane evidence synthesis	✓	
Provide editors and peer reviewers with relevant content expertise to the Central Editorial Service	✓	
Provide content expertise to support the work of the Evidence Synthesis Units	✓	
Disseminate Cochrane evidence within a specific health and care topic area	✓	
Engage with patients and beneficiaries within a specific health and care topic area	✓	
Develop evidence syntheses and submit manuscripts directly to the Central Editorial Service		✓
Build evidence synthesis skills and capacity in both high- and low-and-middle-income countries		✓
Undertake knowledge translation activities		✓
Undertake CENTRAL trial identification and enrichment activities		✓

Selection criteria

Strategic rationale

- Why it is important to establish a Thematic Group in this area – how it addresses key global health challenges (with reference to, e.g., Sustainable Development Goals, Burden of Disease areas, leading causes of preventable deaths etc.)?
- How will the Thematic Group help Cochrane to meet its enabling objectives (efficiency, sustainability, awareness and impact, and accountability)?

Priority setting

- Details of how the Thematic Group intends to set priorities internally, and how it plans to work with other Cochrane Groups and Evidence Synthesis Units to contribute to setting priorities for Cochrane as a whole.

Stakeholder engagement

- Consumer involvement: members of the Consumer Network involved in the application process, plus details of the approach planned for consumer engagement.
- Low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) engagement: details of the approach planned for LMIC engagement.
- Description of established networks and partnerships.
- Details about how the Thematic Group connects to/is differentiated from other current Cochrane Groups.

Dissemination and knowledge translation

- Details about how the Thematic Group plans to disseminate Cochrane evidence.
- Previous knowledge translation activities undertaken by members of the team applying (optional).

Leadership

- Named leader(s).
- Will there be a leadership team for the Thematic Group?
- Will the Thematic Group establish a Board?
- Are there plans for rotational leadership?
- Information about succession planning (where appropriate).

Note: CVs may be requested at a later stage.

Funding

- Provide a list of potential funders and/or details of any discussions that have already occurred.
- Letters of support and details of internal or in-kind support (if available).
- Funding security and any grant restrictions (if relevant).

Operational (personnel, work plan and administration)

- Details of the Thematic Group core team, their roles and time that will be allotted to Cochrane activities. Thematic Groups planning to develop evidence synthesis, should have access to people with relevant skills and experience to ensure delivery of high-quality manuscripts. Details of how appropriate content and methods expertise will be sourced should also be provided.
- Work plan for 18 months from date of application: goals and objectives for the Thematic Group plus specific activities.
- Specify the primary contact for the Thematic Group
- Specify the location and host institution of the Thematic Group.

Note: Letters of support may be requested at a later stage in the application process. This would include letters from other Cochrane Groups, clinical/patient organizations, host institution, funders, and any other key supporters.

Assessment timescales

- The application period will **close by 17:00 (BST) on Friday 5 August 2022.**
- Application assessment by the panel completed: Friday 7 October 2022.
- Final decisions communicated: Friday 21 October 2022.