



AWHONN Literature Review Process

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

AWHONN uses a structured literature review process to develop and revise evidence-based publications, including clinical practice guidelines and standards. The process supports consistency, transparency, methodological rigor, and accountability from the initial literature search through approval and dissemination of final recommendations.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Evidence development, publication, and independent review

AWHONN PROJECT OVERSIGHT AND SUPPORT

Project Director Methodology and process adherence	Project Manager Meetings, communications, timelines, and documentation	Medical Librarian Search strategy, searches, deduplication, and review-ready results	Production Manager Copyediting and final production	AWHONN Nurse Lead Subject-matter expertise throughout
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INDEPENDENT EVIDENCE DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW

Science Team, Writing Team, and Review Panel members are not otherwise involved in the project.



GOVERNANCE AND DECISION-MAKING

The internal AWHONN team determines major decisions, including topic selection, team composition, type of evidence review, draft recommendations, reaffirmation or retirement of existing publications, and final dissemination.

Unless AWHONN formally designates another individual, the AWHONN Project Director serves as the methodology and governance lead. AWHONN maintains a project record that documents each decision, including the date, decision-maker, approving authority, rationale, and required follow-up actions.

TYPES OF EVIDENCE REVIEWS

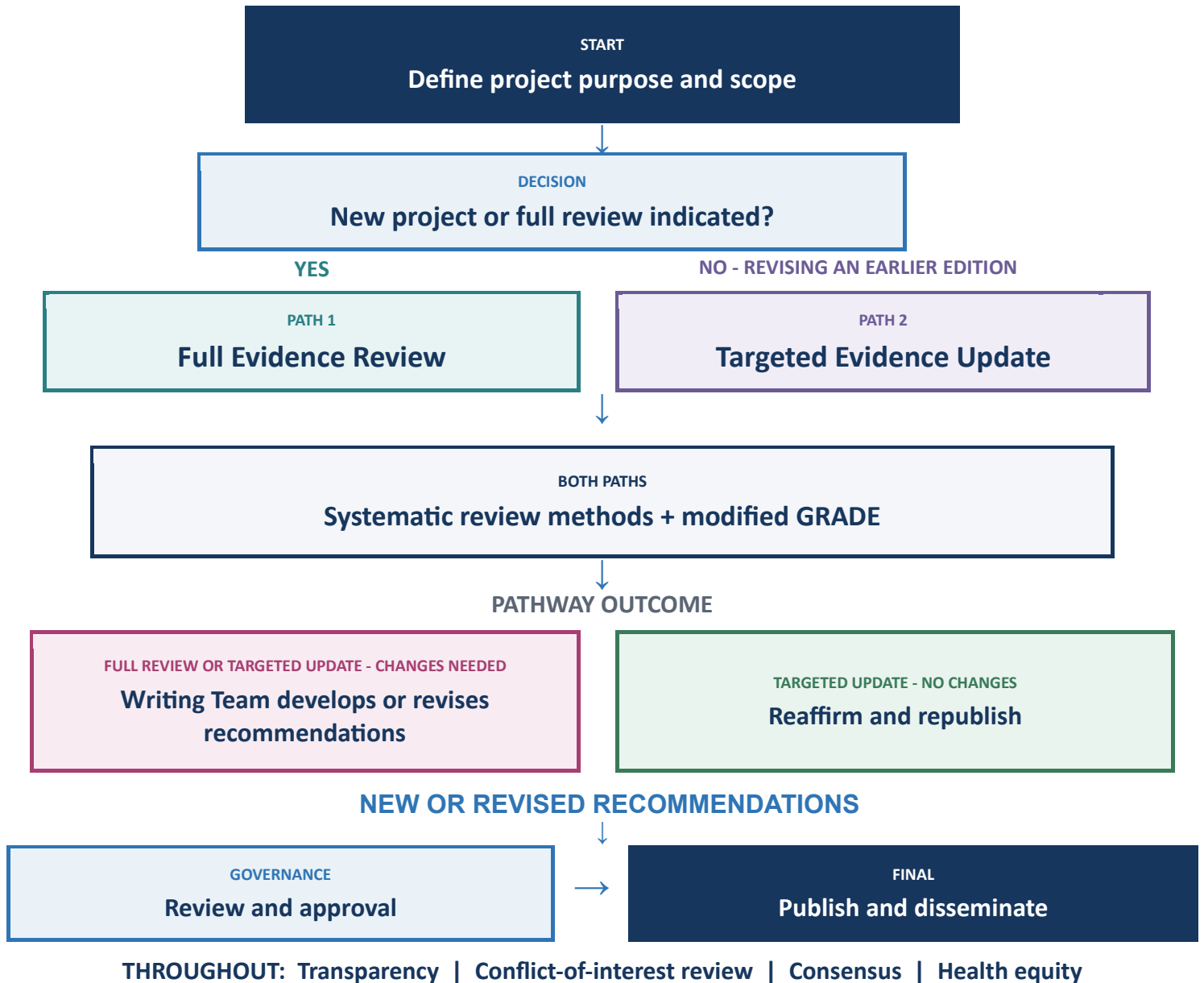
AWHONN selects either a full evidence review or a targeted evidence update based on the project's purpose and scope. AWHONN uses a full evidence review for new projects or when review of the previous edition indicates a full review is appropriate. AWHONN uses a targeted evidence update to revise earlier project editions.

Both approaches follow established systematic review methods and document the research questions, search strategy, screening decisions, data-extraction standards, evidence-synthesis approach, discrepancy-resolution procedures, and final approval.

AWHONN applies a modified GRADE framework from research question development through evidence evaluation, synthesis, and recommendation development. The team reviews potential conflicts of interest before confirming membership, documents reasons for including or excluding studies, resolves reviewer differences, and obtains approval before disseminating recommendations.

AWHONN EVIDENCE REVIEW DECISION PATHWAY

Selecting, conducting, and completing an evidence review



Full Evidence Review

For a full evidence review, the Science Team and Project Director develop preliminary inclusion and exclusion criteria, search terms, and search parameters. The Science Team finalizes these criteria, identifies seminal studies, discusses strategies to reduce reviewer bias, and completes training in data-management and review procedures.

The Medical Librarian searches PubMed, Scopus, and CINAHL. Searches generally focus on human studies from the previous five years and may include seminal research and English-translated studies. The team excludes product-testing studies and publications that do not report results, such as study protocols.

Two Science Team members independently screen each abstract and record whether to include or exclude it. When reviewers disagree, they discuss the record and work toward consensus. If they cannot resolve the disagreement, the full Science Team reviews the record, with Project Director consultation as needed. The team advances studies accepted during abstract screening to full-text review.

Two Science Team members independently assess each full-text article against the eligibility criteria and document the reason for any exclusion. Reviewers base decisions primarily on the study's purpose, methods, and results rather than its background or discussion. Reviewers use the same consensus process from abstract screening to resolve disagreements. The team advances articles accepted after full-text review to data extraction.

A trained Science Team member extracts data from each included study using a standardized template. Extracted information includes the study purpose, sample, eligibility criteria, recruitment methods, design, data-collection procedures, analysis, and findings. Reviewers paraphrase findings rather than copy text directly and focus on information reported from the study purpose through the results. They also evaluate the evidence for validity, relevance, consistency, precision, directness, and potential bias. After the evidence review, the Project Director facilitates a warm handoff to the Writing Team for recommendation writing and final product development.

Targeted Evidence Update

AWHONN may conduct a targeted evidence update when revising a publication supported by a previous systematic evidence review. In this approach, the Science Team retains the critical questions from the earlier review and systematically searches for research published since the previous full or targeted review.

The team evaluates new studies using the same screening, appraisal, extraction, and discrepancy-resolution procedures used for a full review. It integrates new findings with the existing body of evidence. The Science Team reevaluates older references to determine whether they remain relevant, require removal, or should give way to newer evidence. The team considers whether new findings warrant changes to existing recommendations. If no changes are warranted, AWHONN reaffirms and republishes the project. If changes are warranted, the Project Director facilitates a warm handoff to the Writing Team for recommendation writing and final product development.

DEVELOPING EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS

After the evidence review, the Project Director facilitates a warm handoff to the Writing Team for recommendation writing and final product development. The Writing Team uses the GRADE Evidence-to-Decision framework to develop recommendations. The team considers the importance of the problem, anticipated benefits and harms, stakeholder values and preferences, resource requirements, health equity, feasibility, sustainability, and acceptability.

Health equity remains central throughout recommendation development. The Writing Team examines whether a recommendation could disadvantage specific populations or settings, whether baseline differences could affect project impact, and which implementation strategies may reduce, rather than widen, existing inequities.

Using the Science Team's extracted data, the Writing Team writes the recommendations and develops the final product. Before AWHONN disseminates a recommendation, the project team documents the evidence-to-decision rationale, resolves reviewer disagreements, completes conflict-of-interest documentation, and secures approval from the designated governance authority. This process helps ensure AWHONN recommendations are evidence-based, transparent, equitable, and practical for clinicians, patients, families, and healthcare organizations.