**The National Women's Health Information Center
Selection Criteria**

1. Introduction

1.1 *Web Site Goal*

NWHIC is a gateway women's health-related information web site from the United States government. The goal of the web site is to improve consumer access to selected health information from government agencies, their many partner organizations, and other reliable sources that serve the public interest.

1.2 Consumer and Professional Information.

The content of **NWHIC** is structured around publications and organizations that provide information on women's health and other health-related topics.   Many of the publications and organizations in **NWHIC** offer both consumer and professional information, so professionals are finding the web site a convenient resource for client education and cross-disciplinary web browsing. Health professional-only information resources may be found on **NWHIC**'s Resources for Health Professionals page (http://www.4woman.gov/nwhic/profes).

1.3 Credible Organizations and Publications.

In the **NWHIC** selection process, each organization and publication is reviewed to establish its general reliability and credibility. Organizations are also reviewed to establish its ability to respond to inquiries from the public. Once an organization is selected, its traditional contact information, direct Internet links (if available), and an abstract describing the organization and its information and referral services are entered into the **NWHIC** database.

1.4 Selected Publications

One or more of an organization's web-accessible information resources (*publications*) also may be selected and abstracted separately, also with a direct Internet link, to simplify consumer access. Publications include individual documents and other information resources such as brochures, fact sheets, news releases, reports, journals, newsletters, directories, bibliographies, databases and health risk assessments. The organization sponsoring an individual web resource is identified so the user has the option of reviewing the source of the information. Given the frequent changes and crosslinking that are common on the Internet, **NWHIC** *can not* verify the accuracy of specific publications.

1.5 *Structured by Topic.*

The central feature of **NWHIC** is a searchable topic index (http://www.4woman.gov/search/search.cfm) supported by the database of publications and organizations. The index provides user-friendly searching for approximately 800 topics. For the most popular topics, **NWHIC** also assembles frequently asked question (http://www.4woman.gov/faq) documents (FAQs) for quick access by the public. Other resources, such as health-specific Internet indexes, libraries, commercial health news media, etc., also are linked from **NWHIC** if they are useful to the average consumer.

1.6 *Characteristics of Organizations Reviewed*

The organizational characteristics commonly assessed in these selection processes include--

- Nature of the organization (National voluntary**, nonprofit** and professional organizations serving the public interest)
- Nature of the information and services offered by the organization
- Indicators of service area/capacity of the organization to respond to inquiries
- Quality of the information and services provided
- Reputation of the organization in the information and referral community
- Sources of support

1.7 *Characteristics of Publications Reviewed*

The characteristics commonly assessed in the publication selection process include--

- Nature of the publication and the authoring organization
- Nature of the information and services offered by the organization
- Reputation of the organization in the information and referral community
- Capacity of the organization to respond to public inquiries
- Capacity of the organization to fulfill requests for the publication forwarded by NWHIC (on the behalf of our 1-800 callers) via fax or email or internet.
- Publication is offered **free** to public

1.8 *Selection Process Adapted to Internet.*

Since the launch of **NWHIC** in November 1998, the traditional NWHIC content selection process has been adapted to accommodate suggestions received from other federal agencies, other organizations, and consumers who are using the web site. The basic considerations outlined in above have been expanded to include a broader range of organization and resource types, as well as greater consideration of technological barriers to consumer access. This document represents the consensus of the Steering Committee on permanent selection criteria and procedures.

2. Oversight and Management

2.1 *HHS-Developed, Government-wide Service.*

The **NWHIC** web site has been developed by the Office on Women's Health (OWH) in the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), with the active participation of other federal agencies. The online service falls within the larger scope of HHS's public information activities, and its oversight and management structure reflects the government-wide nature of the service. OWH coordinates the development and management of NWHIC and its staff. OWH also reviews and approves all recommendations from NWHIC for additions and deletions from the NWHIC web site and resource database.

3. Selection of Organizations and Web Resources

3.1 *Nomination.*

NWHIC staff will identify new organizations and publications through established selection procedures. The **NWHIC** web site also offers users an opportunity to recommend an organization or resource for consideration. Requestors seeking addition of a resource to NWHIC should read the selection criteria and then submit the on-line "organizational interview" form to NWHIC (via email or fax). OWH, other collaborating federal staff, and cooperating public and private organizations may nominate organizations and publications for inclusion in **NWHIC** as well. Staff from all federal health and human services information clearinghouses will be invited to review **NWHIC** for content and balance and also to nominate new organizations and publications for inclusion.

3.2 *Breadth of the Collection.*

The range of organizations and publications included in the **NWHIC** collection must be broad enough to ensure that consumers will perceive the service to be both useful and unbiased. Because many organizations produce information for both consumers and professionals, and many consumers are seeking more detailed information on topics of concern to them, **NWHIC** will inevitably include both consumer and professionally oriented information.

3.3 Types of Organizations Included.

NWHIC will include organizations providing information and/or referral services for each topic in the index. These organizations will be selected primarily from:

(a) Government and non-commercial organizations, including--
- U.S. government agencies.
- National voluntary, nonprofit, and professional organizations,
- Universities, other educational institutions, and libraries.
- Organizations partnering with government agencies to provide information to the public and other public-private partnerships.

- State and local government agencies offering information services useful beyond their boundaries.
- Patient support and advocacy groups, including self-help groups.
- Foundations.

(b) Certain commercial organizations that offer substantial and free web resources as a public service, such as--

- Commercial news web sites featuring health information news.
- Online journals and newsletters.
- Large indexes and bibliographies of information.
- Web resources or services not available from a government agency
- Organizations need not have an Internet presence to be included in NWHIC; those with more traditional information and referral activities will also be included.
- ***Note on Marketing and Advertising***: Generally, web sites that feature the sale of commercial products or services will not be selected however, the presence of advertising will not automatically disqualify an organization or web resource. For example, a nonprofit might link to a corporate sponsor's web site, or a commercial site might feature advertising on its site, *but not in the resource specifically selected.* Some commercial sites may have licensed significant content from nonprofit or educational institutions (Mayo Clinic, National Health Council, and Johns Hopkins University all have licensing arrangements). Also, any organization or web resource will be excluded from **NWHIC** if its web site's presentation or content would lead a reasonable consumer to infer endorsement of products or services by the U.S. government. All final decisions on selection are made at the discretion of the Office on Women's Health.

3.4 *Characteristics of Organizations Evaluated.*

The organizational characteristics assessed in the selection process include the following. The primary source for evaluation shall be the published information about the organization (primarily its web site, since that is what **NWHIC** users will see) and input from the Office on Women's Health.

- Nature of the organization--published information about government, educational, professional, nonprofit, voluntary, patient support or advocacy, research, or foundation status will be considered.

- Nature of the information and services offered by the organization--publications, telephone hotline or other counseling, databases, bibliographies, research or clinical trial information, financial assistance, technical assistance, support group activities, membership services, etc. will be considered.

- Indicators of service area/capacity of the organization to respond to inquiries-- published information about national, state, or local service; toll-free information services or individual counseling services; free or low-cost information and

services; financial assistance requirements; membership requirements; stated ability to respond to information requests, whether via the Internet or through traditional information and referral service, will be considered.

- Quality of the information and services offered by the organization--**NWHIC** staff will review published (primarily the web site) information from each organization for general consistency and credibility. Organizations should provide a substantial amount of consumer health information as part of their mission, and that information should be current, consistent with basic science and recommendations of recognized authorities, and well-designed. Provision of professional information is an additional factor. Responses to test inquiries by telephone and e-mail should be professional. Staff qualifications relative to information and services provided should be appropriate, and use of an advisory board will also be considered. Specific content and/or target audience(s) should be appropriate for the **NWHIC** collection.

- Reputation of the organization in the information and referral community--**NWHIC** staff will attempt to identify any gaps in this regard. Federal content partners with specific expertise in content areas will be asked, as part of the general review process, to undertake a more in-depth review of length of time in operation, reputation in the information and referral community, direct partnership and/or referral experience of federal agencies and clearinghouses with the organization, sponsorship of significant consumer information or research activities, etc. Identification of the organization as a resource on federal agency web sites will also be considered.

- Sources of support--published information about grants, membership income (professional, voluntary, or support/self-help), publication sales, sponsorship, public-private partnership, government, etc. will be considered. Sponsorship and advertising policies of commercial sites will be considered.

3.5 *Evolving Standards for Information Quality on the Internet.*

Each organization will be evaluated according to published information (primarily web site) as to its adherence to general standards for quality of health information on the Internet, including clear identification of sources of information and funding, sponsoring organizations, staff qualifications, internal review/quality assurance methodology, and privacy practices, as well as currency and scientific accuracy. Examples of evolving standards include-
- Health On the Net Foundation Code of Conduct (http://www.hon.ch/HONcode/Conduct_t.html)
- White Paper: Criteria for Assessing the Quality of Health Information on the Internet (http://hitiweb.mitretek.org/docs/criteria.html)
- Evaluating Quality on the Net (http://www.hopetillman.com/findqual.html)

3.6 *Accessibility to the Technologically Disadvantaged and the Disabled.*

Access to the Internet and state-of-the-art computer hardware and software are far from universal. **NWHIC** will consider technological and design factors affecting the accessibility of organizations' web sites in the selection process, with the goal of choosing web resources accessible to the **NWHIC** target audience of consumers, new Internet users, and users of public Internet access points provided by libraries, schools, kiosks, nonprofit groups, etc. These factors include-

- Network bandwidth requirements (size of graphics and other files, including advertising, and effect on speed of access via a common dial-up connection),

- Compatibility with older web browsers and text browsers used in conjunction with assistive devices to accommodate disabled users as required by the Americans With Disabilities Act (use of tables, frames, audio, video, image maps, etc.),

- Ease of navigation (clarity of design, logic of site flow, search instructions, etc.), and

- Use of 'cookies' and other tracking technologies that profile users, which may intimidate new users, raise privacy concerns, and reduce accessibility from public access facilities.

- Registration requirements for access.

3.7 *Balance of the Collection.*

NWHIC will include organizations regardless of whether their information and referral activities are traditional telephone services or web access to publications and databases. However, because **NWHIC** itself contains web-based information and many of our consumers' expect that our information resources should be web-accessible, it is preferred that all selected publications are available both on the Internet and through ordering.

3.8 *Web Orientation of the Service.*

Format and availability will affect **NWHIC** selection of web resources. Information in the electronic age encompasses much more than digitized versions of traditional brochures or resources. The web permits up-to-the-minute posting of information about health issues. In addition, the relatively low cost of publishing information on the Internet permits more organizations to offer online versions of their publications and frequently asked questions and answers from their members. Generally, resources are designed for the web will be given higher priority, once basic content needs of consumers are met on a given topic.

3.9 *Types of Publications*

Depending upon the availability of suitable resources, **NWHIC** will select publications in the following formats for a given topic:

- An FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) or similar resource to provide quick answers to common questions.
- Digital brochures, publications, fact sheets, reports, etc. presenting consumer-oriented information about the topic.
- Interactive resources such as online quizzes, electronic public service announcements, and health risk assessment tools.

3.10 *Support and Self-help Group Issues.*

NWHIC's selection policy treats support and self-help groups as organizations subject to the same credibility evaluation as other organizations nominated for inclusion in NWHIC. Patient-run organizations should meet all criteria for inclusion; special attention will be given to the presence of an appropriate advisory board, moderation of online discussion activity by a trained professional, and use of disclaimers concerning medical advice and consultation with health professionals.

3.11 *Keeping the Collection Current.*

One of the challenges for ensuring the credibility of the **NWHIC** web service is to maintain the currency of the collection of organizations and publications. This means having the most up-to-date information about organizations and publications. NWHIC staff will work with contacts at the cooperating agencies to identify resources that are revised or become outdated. In addition, web site management software will be used to regularly analyze the integrity of the outward links from **NWHIC**. Recommended additions and deletions resulting from this activity will be handled through the same review process as new acquisitions.

3.12 *'Sunset Clause'.*

For **NWHIC**, which is a selective rather than an exhaustive collection of information resources, another aspect of credibility is the freshness of the selection. Publications will be periodically reviewed for currency. Usually after a period of period of 24 months, they will be tagged to be dropped or deselected from the collection unless they have been revised or updated. Tagged items will be reviewed by NWHIC staff before they are deactivated. Exceptions to this automatic de-selection may be items that are unique or of exceptional merit due to format or content. Recommended additions and deletions resulting from this activity will be handled through the same review process as new acquisitions.

3.13 *De-selection.*

All organizations and web resources in the **NWHIC** collection may be recommended for deletion at any time if they do not continue to meet the general selection guidelines.

3.14 *Recommendations for De-selection.*

Recommendations regarding deletion of organizations or web resources will be accepted through the same mechanisms as nominations for additions.

4. Review of Recommended Additions and Deletions

4.1 *Basic Review Steps.*

All organizations and web resources identified or nominated for addition to the **NWHIC** database and web site are reviewed first by **NWHIC** staff for compliance with the selection guidelines above. Existing resources are verified and updated on a regular schedule. OWH staff oversee this process and approve routine actions. Items that require additional content review are referred to OWH. Actions are summarized by **NWHIC** staff once a month for OWH.

4.2 Levels of Review

(a) First level review. NWHIC staff identify <u>federal</u> organizations and publications that clearly comply with selection guidelines and are similar to those in the initial collection, through their own efforts and through nominations, and add those items to **NWHIC.**   For non-federal resources, and non-controversial, non-commercial private sector resources and services an initial review for selection criteria compliance is completed. <u>All non-federal additions are approved by OWH</u> before the addition of the resource. These additions are reported monthly to OWH.

(b) Nominations may be rejected at the first level of review because they fail to meet the selection criteria-for example, they are (1) primarily commercial or require membership for access, (2) duplicative of existing **NWHIC** links, (3) not current, (4) of insufficient quality, (5) present insufficient evidence of reliability or integrity of the sponsor, or (6) are technologically inaccessible to a majority of users.

(c) Second level review. Recommended additions of non-federal organizations and publications and all proposed deletions are subject to second level review by OWH staff. NWHIC staff prepare recommendations regarding organizations and publications that offer information that impinges on federal policy, regulations, or practice guidelines (mammography or dietary guidelines, for example) and refer them to OWH. NWHIC staff must also refer to OWH all resources of merit that fall outside usual selection criteria because of size, topic, or collection balance, as well as all recommended deletions. OWH reviews the nominated resources and makes the final decision about inclusion to the database or the NWHIC web site.

5. Notice of Selection/Request for Update to Organizations

5.1 When inclusion of an organization or selection of a publication for **NWHIC** is confirmed by OWH, an e-mail message (or letter, if necessary) will be sent to inform the organization. This communication will include information about NWHIC, its selection policies, and HHS's non-endorsement policy, as well as a copy of the database record or web page containing the pertinent information. The organization will be asked to indicate via e-mail or in writing its (a) approval of the information included in **NWHIC** and (b) its willingness to inform **NWHIC** of any change in the status of the organization or web resource.

6. Disclaimers

6.1. The National Women's Health Information Center site provides information to help advance women's health research, services and public and health professional education. The materials contained on this site and in its resources are not intended to be used for the diagnosis or treatment of a health problem or as a substitute for consulting a licensed medical professional. References to any non-government entity, product, service, or source of information that may be contained in this site should not be considered an endorsement, either direct or implied, by the Office on Women's Health (OWH) or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Neither OWH nor the Department is responsible for the content of any non-Federal web pages referenced in this web site.