

## **Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality: Effective Health Care Programs**

*The Effective Health Care Program conducts and supports research with a focus on outcomes, comparative clinical effectiveness, and appropriateness of pharmaceuticals, devices, and health care services. The program focuses on issues of special importance to Medicare, Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).*

**Lead Agency:** Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)

**Agency Mission:** The mission of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality is to improve the safety, quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of health care for all Americans

### **Principal Investigator:**

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### **Partner Agencies:**

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS),  
Food and Drug Administration (FDA),  
National Institutes of Health (NIH)

### **General Description:**

AHRQ's Effective Health Care Program provides current, unbiased evidence about the comparative effectiveness of different health care interventions. The object is to help consumers, health care providers, and others make informed choices among treatment alternatives, including drugs. The program was created under Section 1013 of the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003 to conduct research regarding "the outcomes, comparative clinical effectiveness, and appropriateness of health care items and services." The program was launched in 2005 and focused initially on issues of special importance to Medicare but has been expanded to include Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

The Effective Health Care Program employs three approaches to its comparative effectiveness research:

*Synthesize knowledge* – AHRQ's 14 Evidence-based Practice Centers perform systematic reviews of published and unpublished scientific evidence. They produce reviews of comparative effectiveness, synthesizing what is known and where further research is needed.

*Generate knowledge* – A 13-member research network (the Developing Evidence to Inform Decisions about Effectiveness [DEcIDE] network) carries out accelerated practical studies as well as research to improve analytic tools.

*Translate knowledge* – The John M. Eisenberg Clinical Decisions and Communications Science Center distills research and presents results in a variety of useful and understandable formats. The Center also develops decision aid tools for consumers.

In the Effective Health Care Program, AHRQ seeks an emphasis on timely and usable findings, building on the thoroughness and unbiased reliability that have been hallmarks of efforts so far. Equally important is broad ongoing consultation with stakeholders which helps ensure that the program responds to issues most pressing for health care decision makers. Collaboration is also a key principle of the program and AHRQ works closely with many agencies of DHHS to identify topics for research under the program and to communicate findings, including identified research gaps.

All reports produced by the program are available on the Effective Health Care Web site, <http://www.EffectiveHealthCare.ahrq.gov>. The Web site also includes features for the public to participate in the Effective Health Care Program. Users can sign up to receive notification when new reports are available. They can also be notified when draft reports and other features are posted for comment, and comments can be submitted through the Web site. The public is also invited to use the Web site to nominate topics for research by the Effective Health Care Program.

***Innovativeness:*** Why is this research exciting and newsworthy?

Which medical treatments are most effective? Which carry the most risks? AHRQ's Effective Health Care Program is the Federal Government's leading effort to make evidence-based comparisons of health care interventions. The Effective Health Care Program, with funding that doubled to \$30 million in 2008, is unique among comparative effectiveness initiatives. Research topics reflect Federal priorities to improve the health of all Americans and include critical issues facing today's elderly population.

Pursuant to the legislative mandate and the impending implementation of the Medicare prescription drugs benefit, the Secretary in 2005 chose an initial set of 10 priority conditions focusing primarily on the needs of Medicare program. Through discussion with and extensive input from stakeholders, the Secretary in 2008 expanded the list of priority conditions to include conditions relevant not only to the Medicare program, but also Medicaid and SCHIP programs. This updated list of clinical conditions guides research, synthesis and translation and dissemination priorities for the Effective Health Care Program:

- Arthritis and nontraumatic joint disorders (Muscle, bone, and joint conditions)
- Cancer (Cancer)

- Cardiovascular disease, including stroke and hypertension (Heart and blood vessel conditions)
- Dementia, including Alzheimer's Disease (Brain and nerve conditions)
- Depression and other mental health disorders (Mental health)
- Developmental delays, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism (Developmental delays, ADHD, autism)
- Diabetes Mellitus (Diabetes)
- Functional limitations and disability (Functional limitations and physical disabilities)
- Infectious diseases including HIV/AIDS (Infectious diseases and HIV/AIDS)
- Obesity (Obesity)
- Peptic ulcer disease and dyspepsia (Digestive system conditions)
- Pregnancy including pre-term birth (Pregnancy and childbirth)
- Pulmonary disease/Asthma (Breathing conditions)
- Substance abuse (Alcohol and drug abuse)

One part of the Effective Health Care Program, The John M. Eisenberg Clinical Decisions and Communications Science Center, is devoted to developing tools to help people make decisions about health care. The Eisenberg Center translates knowledge about effective health care into summaries that use understandable, actionable language. An important function of the Eisenberg Center is to transform complex scientific information into short, plain language materials that can be used to assess treatments, medications, and technologies. The Eisenberg Center develops information summaries for three audience groups -- consumers, clinicians, and policymakers. The guides are designed to help people including older persons, populations and an aging society use scientific information to maximize the benefits of health care, minimize harm, and optimize the use of health care resources.

The Effective Health Care Program has published a variety of research reviews, new research reports, and summary guides on a variety of topics relevant to the needs of people age 65 or older. Selected research is listed below and all products are available online, some with audio links for the visually impaired ([www.effectivehealthcare.arhq.gov](http://www.effectivehealthcare.arhq.gov)).

Comparative effectiveness research is changing practice. Our mission will be fulfilled when health care decision makers – including patients, clinicians, purchasers, and

policymakers – use up-to-date, evidence-based information about their treatment options to make informed health care decisions.