



## South African Initiative for Systematic Reviews on Health Policies and Systems

June 2013 - June 2015

### Invitation to suggest systematic review topics and questions

#### Background:

The Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (AHPSR: <http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/en/>) has recently funded the establishing in South Africa of a centre for systematic reviews on health policies and systems research. The centre will be called the *South African Initiative for Systematic Reviews on Health Policies and Systems* (referred to henceforth in this letter as the *SA Initiative – SAI*). The initiative will be based at the Health Systems Research Unit (HSRU) of the South African Medical Research Council (<http://www.mrc.ac.za/healthsystems/healthsystems.htm>).

The objectives of the SAI are:

- to develop further institutional capacity in LMICs for conducting and packaging of systematic reviews on health policy and systems research<sup>1</sup>;
- to conduct four reviews that are policy-relevant at the national level and could be relevant to the needs of other countries in the region or in similar settings in other parts of the world;
- to prepare products out of these reviews which are targeted at decision-makers; and
- to disseminate the reviews and related products to potential users, particularly decision-makers, and to promote their uptake and use.

The SAI will be led by the HSRU and the department of HIV STD and Tuberculosis (HAST) of the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, in partnership with the South African Cochrane Centre (SACC: <http://www.mrc.ac.za/cochrane/cochrane.htm>). The following people are serving on the Steering Committee of the SAI:

- Dr. Karen Daniels, HSRU (Chair)
- Dr. Aziza Mwisongo, HSRC (Co-chair)
- Mr. Arrie Odendaal, HSRU (Co-ordinator)
- Prof. Charles Hongoro, HSRC
- Dr. Simon Lewin, HSRU and Norwegian Knowledge Centre for the Health Services
- Dr. Tamara Kredon, SACC
- Dr. Taryn Young, SACC and Centre for Evidence Based Health Care (University of Stellenbosch)

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<sup>1</sup> Health policy and systems research has been defined as “the production of new knowledge to improve how societies organise themselves to achieve health goals. The World Health Organization defines a health system as all organisations, people and actions whose primary intent is to promote, restore or maintain health” (From: What is health policy and systems research and why does it matter? Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research. June 2012. [http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/resources/alliancehpsr\\_briefingnote1.pdf](http://www.who.int/alliance-hpsr/resources/alliancehpsr_briefingnote1.pdf)).

## Setting Review Topics

The AHPSR has not set methodological boundaries on the type of systematic reviews that are to be conducted. This allows the SAI the liberty of conducting quantitative, qualitative, economic and mixed methods reviews, as deemed appropriate to the review question. However, the AHPSR has set a very clear mandate for the SAI to engage a wide range of both research and policy maker stakeholders when developing the systematic review topics and questions. As such we are writing to you to request your assistance in helping us to identify which topics or issues are currently regarded as being of a high priority to health systems and policy development in your context. With your input we plan to undertake systematic reviews of a range of high priority health systems and policy questions including but not limited to:

- The effectiveness of health interventions (e.g. can nurses effectively substitute for doctors in primary care?)
- Factors affecting the implementation of health interventions (e.g. what factors influence the implementation of nurse-doctor substitution programmes in low- and middle-income countries?)
- Views of stakeholders regarding a health system intervention or policy (e.g. what is the acceptability to communities of lay or community health workers promoting HIV testing in households?)
- The cost of different health financing options (e.g. how cost effective is universal coverage in comparison to some form of national health insurance).

The initiative *will not* undertake reviews of clinical questions (e.g. the effectiveness of drugs and technologies) or of diagnostic test accuracy (e.g. the effectiveness of rapid diagnostic tests for diagnosing uncomplicated *P. falciparum* malaria in endemic countries).

## Call for suggestions for systematic review topics and questions

Even if you have not been involved in a systematic review previously, you have a lot of experience of the health systems problems within your context. It is this experience and insight that we are now calling upon. Would you please assist us by listing in the table below questions or issues that **you think** are high priorities for new systematic reviews in the South African or African context. You may find it helpful to consider the following formats when thinking through your questions:

- Effectiveness questions: what are the population/s, intervention, comparison/s and outcomes of interest? (e.g. *population* – people attending primary care facilities; *intervention* – nurses substituting for doctors; *comparison* – no substitution; *outcomes* – quality of care, patient satisfaction)
- Implementation, views and acceptability questions: *what are the settings or contexts of interest* (e.g. primary care facilities)?; *which groups are of interest* (e.g. patients attending these facilities)?; *what are the interventions or issues of concern* (e.g. nurse-doctor substitution)?; *what issues or perspectives need to be explored* (e.g. patients' experiences of nurse-doctor substitution)?; *what comparisons need to be explored* (e.g. patients' acceptance of one type of provider as compared to another type of provider)?; *what types of evaluations and results would be of interest* (e.g. qualitative [stakeholder perspectives], quantitative [outcomes and indicators], economic [the cost of the intervention]).

Please try to be as specific as possible about your question. Questions may be broad (e.g. what range of economic incentives may be effective in retaining health professionals in rural facilities?) or narrow (e.g. what are the views of policy makers regarding providing economic incentives to patients for adherence to TB treatment?). We have attached a separate document with some prompts to help you clarify your question. Please note that we will take all suggested questions seriously, even if your question doesn't fit with any of the examples listed above.

	Review topics in order of priority
1	
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3	
4	
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7	

### The process after your questions have been gathered

This request has been sent out to about 50 people. After we have received all the replies we will group the questions by similarity and try to identify the key issue being addressed in each group. We will then take these questions to our Advisory Group of researchers and policy makers. Together with this Advisory Group we will develop four systematic review questions based on all of your suggestions. We will place particular emphasis on how you prioritised your questions/issues. Thereafter we will work with research teams to conduct reviews on these questions. ***It would therefore also be good if you would let us know if you're interested in participating in a review – you need not have experience as we will offer some training.*** Once the reviews are completed and

published, then we will distribute them along with all products developed out of the reviews. Over next year we will also set up a webpage, the address of which we will also publicise.

### **Suggestions of other stakeholders to be contacted**

Finally, would you please assist us by listing below others (including policy makers, researchers, members of civil society organisations and NGOs) who you think could help to identify high priority systematic review questions.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>e-mail address</b>	<b>Contact number</b>

We would welcome you sharing this request amongst your networks. Should you wish to have any more information, please don't hesitate to contact us ([Karen.Daniels@mrc.ac.za](mailto:Karen.Daniels@mrc.ac.za); [Willem.Odendaal@mrc.ac.za](mailto:Willem.Odendaal@mrc.ac.za))

### **Return date**

May we kindly ask that you respond to our request by the **15<sup>th</sup> of July**.

Kind regards,

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Steering Committee Chair)  
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