

Terms of Reference for the COVID-19 Expert Advisory Group

Background

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which is caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), was first identified in December 2019. In response to the evolving pandemic, the international research evidence base is rapidly expanding.

Since September 2020, HIQA has provided evidence synthesis reports and evidence-based advice in response to requests from the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHE), the Department of Health, the COVID Advisory Group and from other health bodies tasked with the public health response to COVID-19. This work, generally conducted within a two to three week turnaround time, helps ensure rapid access to the best available evidence relevant to COVID-19 to inform national health decision-making and policy at each stage of the pandemic.

For this purpose, HIQA has established a COVID-19 Evidence Synthesis Team within its Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Directorate. The team conducts evidence synthesis with the support of HIQA's COVID-19 Expert Advisory Group (EAG). The EAG was convened to provide expert public health and clinical interpretation of the available evidence base. It also provides a forum for broad public health and clinical expertise to input to the national COVID-19 response on requested topics. On occasion, ad hoc members are invited to join the EAG to support the interpretation of the evidence. Requirement for this additional support is identified by the Evidence Synthesis Team on the basis of additional clinical, methodological or contextual issues (for example social, ethical or organisational implications) relevant to the policy topic and or implementation of a particular intervention. Involvement in the EAG requires participation in regular virtual meetings, ordinarily on a weekly basis, as well as reviewing draft reports as outlined in the terms of reference below. In accordance with our standard procedures, members of the group complete a conflict of interest and confidentiality declaration.

HIQA takes consideration of the identified evidence base, the expert public health and clinical interpretation by the EAG, and any other relevant information including issues raised by relevant stakeholders, when developing the advice that is provided to groups tasked with the public health response to COVID-19.

The protocols for the evidence synthesis, the evidence synthesis reports and the associated advice are published on www.hiqa.ie.

Terms of Reference

In relation to COVID-19-related evidence synthesis, members of the Expert Advisory Group will:

1. Contribute to the provision of high-quality research by HIQA.
2. Contribute fully to the work, debate, and decision-making processes of the group by providing expert guidance, as appropriate.
3. Be prepared to provide expert advice on relevant issues outside of group meetings, as requested.
4. Provide advice to HIQA regarding the scope of an analysis.
5. Support the Evidence Synthesis Team led by HIQA during the research process by providing access to pertinent data, as appropriate.
6. Review draft protocols and reports from the Evidence Synthesis Team and recommend amendments, as appropriate.
7. Support the development of evidence-based advice from HIQA to NPHE, on behalf of the Department of the Minister for Health and to the Health Service Executive, using a structured Evidence to Advice approach.
8. Contribute to HIQA's development of its approach to health services research by participating in an evaluation of the process on occasion.
9. Notify the project lead if a nominee can no longer participate or contribute to the process as non-participation may require alternative EAG membership to be sought.