



How Does the Prevention Services Clearinghouse Determine Which Studies Are Eligible to be Reviewed?

Handbook of Standards and Procedures, Version 2.0

Abt Global: Cara Jackson, Sandra Jo Wilson, and Meaghan Glenn.
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Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse conducts objective, independent, and transparent reviews of research on programs and services intended to provide enhanced support to children and families and prevent foster care placements.

The Clearinghouse uses a systematic review process implemented by trained reviewers using consistent, transparent standards and procedures outlined in the [Handbook of Standards and Procedures, Version 2.0](#). Clearinghouse staff use this systematic review process to (1) identify programs and services for review, (2) select and prioritize programs and services for review, (3) conduct a literature search to locate research studies on the effectiveness of the prioritized programs and services, (4) screen studies for eligibility and prioritize them for review, (5) conduct an evidence review to rate the strength of evidence of the studies using the design and execution standards, (6) record and characterize impact estimates as favorable, sustained favorable, unfavorable, or no effect, and (7) rate programs and services as well-supported, supported, promising, or does not currently meet criteria.

This fact sheet focuses on step 4 in the process and explains how Clearinghouse reviewers screen studies to determine whether a study of a particular program or service is eligible for review. The Clearinghouse defines a “study” as one research investigation of a defined subject sample, and the interventions, measures, and statistical analyses applied to that sample.

PROCESS TIMELINE



Which studies are eligible for review?

To be eligible for review, the study must:



- Evaluate the version of the program or service currently under review.
- Use a randomized or quasi-experimental group design with at least one intervention condition and one or more appropriate comparison conditions that use some form of control.
 - » Appropriate comparison conditions include: no intervention, untreated group, or wait list; minimal intervention; placebo or attention control; treatment as usual; or head-to-head comparisons.
- Measure and report program or service impacts on at least one eligible outcome.
- Be published or prepared in or after 1990.

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- Be publicly available (i.e., available to the public to download, request, or purchase). This includes: (a) studies published in journals; and (b) published studies reported in documents prepared or commissioned by federal, state, tribal, or local government agencies or departments, private agencies or organizations, universities, research institutes, research firms, foundations or other funding entities, or other similar organizations.
- Be available in English. The Clearinghouse is planning to conduct a pilot to understand the feasibility of identifying and reviewing studies published only in Spanish.

For more information about study eligibility criteria, see section 4 of the [Handbook Version 2.0](#).

What are common reasons that studies are not eligible for review?

Studies may be ineligible for a variety of reasons, and some studies are ineligible for multiple reasons. The most common reasons that studies are ineligible are detailed below.

1. They do not examine the version of the program or service currently under review. To be eligible for review, studies of a program or service must all represent similar implementations of the program under review; that is, programs or services may not be substantially modified or adapted from the written protocol, book, manual, or other documentation (manual) or version of the program or service selected for review.

- If a study indicates that content was substantially adapted (such as adding a new component or substantially changing the number of sessions) or the mode of delivery was adapted (such as changing from in-person to online), the Clearinghouse may determine that the study is not evaluating the program or service that was selected for review.
- If a study implements an older version of a program or service selected for review and the older version of the manual is substantially different from the manual selected for review, the Clearinghouse may determine that the study is not eligible for review.

2. The study does not use a design that establishes that the program or service, and not other factors, is responsible for the outcomes observed.

- Not all studies are designed to support causal inferences about a program or service. For example, studies that use a pre-post design in which all study participants received the intervention cannot isolate the effect of the program from other factors that may explain changes in outcomes, such as children maturing or symptoms naturally improving over time. In such cases, the Clearinghouse cannot be confident that the outcomes reflect the causal impact of the program.
- Eligible studies must use a design with at least one intervention condition involving the program or service under review and one or more appropriate comparison conditions that use some form of control.

Chapter 4 of the [Handbook Version 2.0](#) provides a complete list of study eligibility criteria, and the [Reporting Guide for Study Authors](#) offers advice to help study authors describe their studies along all the criteria the Clearinghouse uses to determine if studies are eligible for review.

Many programs and services have more than one manual edition or version. The Clearinghouse typically selects the most current publicly available manual edition as the focal manual for the program or service, based on the prioritization criterion for programs or services that are in active use ([Handbook Version 2.0](#), Section 2.2.2).

If the Clearinghouse determines that a *manual edition* or *variant* has any substantial adaptations from the focal manual identified, the alternative manual edition is considered to describe a separate program or service.

Section 4.1.9 of the [Handbook Version 2.0](#) describes how the Clearinghouse determines if a particular study indicates substantial differences from the program or service under review.

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Cara Jackson, Sandra Jo Wilson, and Meaghan Glenn

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Christine Fortunato, Laura Nerenberg, and Jenessa Malin, Project Officers
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Project Director: Sandra Jo Wilson

Abt Global
6130 Executive Blvd.
Rockville, MD, 20852

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