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Applied Health Research Question (AHRQ)
2012/13 Guidelines
Planning, Research and Analysis Branch
Health System Strategy and Policy Division
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
May 2012
Introduction

The Planning, Research and Analysis Branch in the Health System Strategy and Policy Division of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) supports leading edge health research and knowledge translation activities for the benefit of the Ontario health system. This research provides data, analyses and knowledge to help build a strong, evidence-based foundation for innovation and decision making to improve the Ontario health care system. The funding agreements established by the Planning, Research and Analysis Branch require most research institutes, centres and projects to set aside a portion of their annual MOHLTC research funding towards Applied Health Research Questions (AHRQs).

An AHRQ is a question posed by a health system policy maker or provider in order to obtain research evidence to inform planning, policy and program development that will benefit the broader Ontario health system.

The AHRQ process:

- Facilitates the direct interaction and dialogue between policy makers, providers, development/planning staff and researchers.
- Identifies research needs and gaps in research evidence across the health system.
- Informs priority setting for research projects by supporting research within these areas.
- Disseminates research findings broadly.

Principles

- Research Excellence – The AHRQ process and its participants strive for excellence in research.
- Relevance – Questions must address an identified research need or gap that will directly or indirectly benefit (i.e., provide research evidence to) agents and service providers in the Ontario health system.
- Collaboration – Areas of research need and questions are initiated by Knowledge Users; however, the specific research scope and question is defined through collaboration by Knowledge Users and the Research Providers.
- Accessibility and Knowledge Transfer – Summaries of synthesized and new research evidence stemming from the AHRQ process are made accessible to a broad audience.
Participants

- Knowledge Users: Individuals representing Ontario organizations that are seeking research evidence to inform planning, the provision of services, policy and/or program development in health and the health care system.\(^1\)

- Research Providers: Research institutes, centres or projects that receive funding from the Planning, Research and Analysis Branch under a Transfer Payment Accountability Agreement.\(^2\)

- Research Unit in the Planning, Research and Analysis Branch: Functions as the coordinator and evaluator of the AHRQ process. The Research Unit’s role is to facilitate direct contact between Knowledge Users and Research Providers. The Research Unit is available as support if questions or issues arise, e.g., demand exceeds the organization’s available funds or capacity to respond, insufficient demand, poor alignment of question with organization’s expertise, advice on prioritizing, etc. The Research Unit will also evaluate the AHRQ process, and introduce modifications to it as appropriate.

Three Types of Research Provider Responses

1. Rapid response – Preliminary information in one week or less providing a “first blush” response, e.g., expert opinion or relevant systematic reviews, articles or reports on a given policy topic.

2. Research report or technical brief – Approximately 4-8 weeks of work to quickly synthesize the existing research evidence on a given topic. The final product could be a presentation or a report. Upon conclusion of the AHRQ, the researcher will complete the AHRQ Summary of Findings Form which will be disseminated broadly once completed.

3. Research project – Where it has been confirmed that new knowledge must be generated, i.e., existing knowledge is not sufficient for planning or policy development requirements, new research projects will be initiated. The duration may be months, or years, depending on the project. For longer-term projects it is expected that some information be provided within the funded fiscal year. Institutions should contact the Research Unit prior to undertaking any longer-term projects. Organizations should not initiate new multi-year projects if they have one year funding agreements unless they can produce some interim or preliminary findings during the funded period. At the end of the project, the researcher will complete an AHRQ Summary of Findings Form which will be disseminated broadly. Interim or preliminary findings will not be disseminated.

It is understood that not every question will result in a research response.

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\(^1\) See also Frequently Asked Question #2
\(^2\) See also Frequently Asked Question #3
Process and Timing
The AHRQ process will be ongoing throughout the funding year. Knowledge Users should be mindful of the fact that as the funding year progresses, Research Providers might have less capacity to take on new projects as they expend their funding related to AHRQ. Research Providers should limit their work to projects that will have some results within the period for which they have confirmed funding. Figure 1 provides an overview of the AHRQ Process for 2012/13.
Figure 1: AHRQ Process for 2012/13

1. Research Unit Initiation of AHRQ Process
   • Research Unit sends outreach email with AHRQ guideline and Research Provider contact information to Knowledge Users cc: to Research Providers
   • Research Providers have the option of forwarding email to local Knowledge Users

2. Knowledge User – Research Provider Contact
   • Knowledge User contacts potential Research Providers
   • Knowledge User and Research Provider dialogue to scope AHRQ
   • Research Provider notifies the Research Unit via email within two business days of receiving a new type 2 or 3 AHRQ request.

3. Research Unit Identifies Previous Relevant Work and Provides Support as Required
   • Research Unit searches internal repositories and shares previously completed work with Knowledge User and Research Provider
   • Research Unit also provides support throughout the process on request

4. Initiation of Work
   • Research Provider informs the Research Unit of the question that will be addressed, then initiates work

5. Research Progress Reported
   • Research Provider submits Workplan Report (Research Provider Template #1) quarterly to Research Unit

6. Interim/Preliminary Results Presented
   • For type 2 and 3 responses, Research Provider schedules interim/pre-final report meeting with Knowledge User and Research Unit

7. Research Results Communicated
   • Research Provider sends response to Knowledge User cc: Research Unit. Information is now available to be disseminated broadly.

8. Knowledge Transfer and Dissemination
   • For type 2 and 3 research responses, Research Provider sends one-page AHRQ Summary of Findings Form to Research Unit
   • Research Unit works with Research Providers to identify appropriate knowledge translation opportunities.
The Responsibilities of Research Providers

Research Providers will:

- Forward Research Unit outreach email to local Knowledge Users (optional).
- Notify Research Unit within 2 business days of receiving a new AHRQ request.
- Work with Knowledge Users to define the scope of the question and suggest ways to ensure that AHRQs result in high-quality research products.
- For type 2 and type 3 responses, submit Knowledge User AHRQ Request Form via email to ResearchUnit@ontario.ca, including those that are declined.
- Leverage existing projects and align requests to maximize the number of AHRQs that can be addressed.
- Inform Research Unit via email to ResearchUnit@ontario.ca before work on a new type 2 or type 3 question is initiated.
- Complete the Quarterly Workplan Report.
- Contact Research Unit for assistance if questions arise (e.g., too many or too few questions are received, Knowledge Users expectations cannot be met).
- Ensure that the research is conducted, and if a non-expert does the research, that the product is reviewed by an expert or senior scientist before it is finalized for the Knowledge User.
- Schedule and lead at least one meeting/call with the Knowledge User and Research Unit before the final product is delivered for type 2 and type 3 responses.
- Include the Research Unit on the final email correspondence for all three types of responses and provide the Research Unit with a copy of all final materials provided to the Knowledge User.
- Complete the AHRQ Summary of Findings Form for type 2 and type 3 responses once the research is completed and return to the Research Unit.
- Complete an annual online survey about the AHRQ process.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>List of Research Provider Templates</th>
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<tr>
<td>AHRQ Quarterly Workplan Report</td>
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<tr>
<td>AHRQ Summary of Findings Form</td>
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The Responsibilities of Knowledge Users

Knowledge Users will:

- Initiate direct contact with Research Providers by submitting Knowledge User AHRQ Request form for type 2 and type 3 responses.
- Work with Research Providers to identify which of the three AHRQ responses is most appropriate given their information need and timeline for decision.
- Provide the Research Provider with a brief summary of the background and the purpose of the actual question being proposed. (More detail provided in Knowledge User AHRQ Request Form.)
- Develop research question and obtain approvals from senior decision maker (e.g., assistant deputy minister, executive director) to ensure that research questions reflect the need for...
knowledge in the Ontario health system. Questions based on personal interest or other non-system purposes are not suitable for the AHRQ process.

- Participate in the Research Provider-led meeting/call before the final product is delivered for type 2 and type 3 responses.
- Complete an annual online survey about the AHRQ process.

The Responsibilities of the Research Unit

The Research Unit will:

- Define and oversee the AHRQ process. Track all AHRQ questions, including those that are not answered.
- Start the 2012/13 AHRQ process with an email to potential Knowledge Users cc: Research Providers.
- Provide all Research Providers and potential Knowledge Users with information on the AHRQ process including the area of focus and contact details for the main AHRQ coordinator for each Planning, Research and Analysis Branch-funded organization or project.
- When new requests are made by Knowledge Users, determine whether similar questions have been posed and responded to previously, share relevant findings from previous work, advise Knowledge User and Research Provider when a new AHRQ is not required.
- Be available as a resource if issues arise, e.g., demand exceeds available funds, insufficient demand, poor alignment of question with organization’s expertise, advice on prioritizing, etc.
- Participate in the Research Provider-led meeting/call before the final product is delivered for type 2 and type 3 responses.
- Disseminate completed one page summaries for type 2 and type 3 responses broadly.
- Evaluate the AHRQ process, e.g., administer researcher and knowledge-user satisfaction surveys, review final materials, and analyze the impact of the AHRQ process and AHRQ funding.
Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is an Applied Health Research Question (AHRQ)?
   An AHRQ is a question posed by a health system Knowledge User in order to request research evidence that can be applied to improve or benefit the Ontario health system. Institutes, centres and projects funded by the Planning, Research and Analysis Branch provide responses to AHRQs in order to inform planning, policy and program development, which in turn helps strengthen the Ontario health system.

2. Can you provide some examples of Knowledge Users?
   Knowledge Users include policy development staff, planners and decision makers from across the Ontario health system including, but not limited to: Ontario ministries, Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), hospitals (acute and rehabilitation), Community Care Access Centres, provincial associations and agencies (e.g., Health Quality Ontario, Public Health Ontario). Research Providers may also suggest their own local Knowledge Users.

3. Can you provide some examples of Research Providers?
   Research Providers are the research institutes, centres or projects that receive funding from the Planning, Research and Analysis Branch in 2012/13 under a Transfer Payment Accountability Agreement. A full list of Research Providers is available on request from ResearchUnit@ontario.ca.

4. Will the Research Unit screen who can be a Knowledge User?
   No, the Research Unit will not be screening Knowledge Users. It will be the responsibility of the Research Providers to determine if the research evidence being sought has the potential to impact planning, policy or program decisions in health and the health care system to be eligible for consideration as an AHRQ. The Research Unit will provide input and advice to Research Providers on request. AHRQs must be approved in writing by a senior decision maker within the Knowledge User’s organization (e.g., assistant deputy minister, executive director).

5. Can organizations that are not on the first outreach email participate as Knowledge Users in the AHRQ process and will the knowledge exchange with them count as AHRQ products in reporting to MOHLTC?
   Yes. Research Providers can forward the Research Unit outreach email to local Knowledge Users. It is the responsibility of the research organization to ensure that the engagement with Knowledge Users and resulting AHRQ products meet the requirements for AHRQs.

6. Prior to the launch of the 2012/13 AHRQ process, some Knowledge Users have already connected with Research Providers to undertake AHRQ activities. Does the Research Provider need to inform the Research Unit?
   Yes, Research Providers must include this activity on the Quarterly Workplan Report to be submitted to the Research Unit.

Please direct questions to ResearchUnit@ontario.ca or the Research Unit Manager at 416-327-1969
7. Are there any restrictions regarding scientists’ publication rights or data ownership rights?

- Scientists’ publication rights and/or data ownership rights are set out in the Transfer Payment Accountability Agreements between Research Providers and the MOHLTC and require that:
  - The Research Provider acknowledge, in a form approved by the Province, the support of the Province in any publication of any kind, written or oral, relating to the research activities funded by MOHLTC.
  - The Research Provider indicates in any published material that the views expressed are the views of the Research Provider and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.
  - All copyright and other intellectual property rights within the published material of any kind produced by the Research Provider shall belong to the Research Provider.

8. What if a question posed appears to seek data and analysis that would support advocacy rather than research evidence and advice?

Research under AHRQ is intended to inform planning, policy and program development that benefits the Ontario health system broadly. Research evidence presented to Knowledge Users must be balanced and reflect the evidence base. For example, Knowledge Users may request a summary of all evidence related to a policy or program but may not ask for only successful examples of implementation. Requests to support specific advocacy positions are not in scope, or appropriate, for the AHRQ process.

9. What documents do I need to complete?

Knowledge Users:

- Knowledge User AHRQ Request Form (for type 2 and type 3 responses)

Research Providers:

- AHRQ Quarterly Workplan Report. Research Providers to submit the workplan to the ResearchUnit@ontario.ca at the end of each quarter in the funding year:
  - July 31st (for period of April to June)
  - October 31st (for period of July to September)
  - January 31st (for period of October to December)
  - April 30th (for period of January to March)

- AHRQ Summary of Findings Form. Research Providers to complete the one page summary template (for type 2 and 3 responses) once the final product is completed. Copy ResearchUnit@ontario.ca on the final email correspondence and provide the Research Unit with a copy of all final materials provided to the Knowledge User.
10. What if the Research Provider cannot complete the work proposed within the 2012/13 year?

- A Research Provider might identify from the beginning that the question cannot be researched within the proposed time or funding period. The Research Provider should communicate this directly to the Knowledge User and the Research Unit. The Research Providers and Knowledge Users can then work together, involving the Research Unit for advice as required, to determine if an interim product or preliminary response can be produced during the funded period. The Research Provider should further note if a project will continue beyond the funded period in the AHRQ Quarterly Workplan Report.

   The Research Provider, Knowledge User and Research Unit may also agree to bring forward the AHRQ in the future (noting that no commitments can be made outside the funded period).

11. When do Research Providers need to contact the Research Unit?

- Notify the Research Unit via email within 2 business days of receiving a new AHRQ request.
- Send the completed Knowledge User AHRQ Request Form to the Research Unit, including questions that are declined.
- Notify Research Unit of the type 2 or type 3 question that will be addressed before work is initiated.
- Submit AHRQ Quarterly Workplan Report quarterly to Research Unit.
- Copy Research Unit when sending research results to Knowledge User.

12. Who will be responsible for dissemination when research is finalized?

   Depending on the nature of the work, dissemination may involve collaboration between a combination of the Research Provider, Knowledge User and Research Unit. The format for dissemination will also depend on the nature of the work.
APPENDICES

(Electronic Word/Excel documents also available)
Knowledge User AHRQ Request Form

Please complete this form and submit to a research institution to initiate the AHRQ process. A list of contact information and area of expertise for ministry-funded research institutions is attached.

*Please note that research under AHRQ is intended to support policy development and planning to improve the Ontario health system. Requests to support specific advocacy positions are not in scope, or appropriate for the AHRQ process.

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<td>Date research is needed</td>
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The ARHQ is submitted to:

Research Provider Organization:

Date:

1. What type of research evidence response are you seeking?
   - [ ] Rapid response
   - [ ] Research report or technical brief
   - [ ] Research project

2. Provide a brief summary of the background and the purpose of the actual question being proposed. Why is this AHRQ being proposed? (e.g., development of guidelines on improving prevention and care delivery of a specific chronic disease.)

The information supplied in this request form is not confidential and may be shared at the discretion of the ministry.

Please direct questions to ResearchUnit@ontario.ca or the Research Unit Manager at 416-327-1969.
3. What is the current status of knowledge by the Knowledge User group? (e.g., there is some anecdotal evidence that the existing delivery of services do not adequately capture high-risk groups.)

4. How will the eventual research evidence be used and what purpose will the proposed research serve? (e.g., the research evidence will be reviewed by senior management and service delivery partners and considered in the development of a defined preferred model of care and best practice relating to a health care issue.)

5. Please name at least two other organizations or program areas that can benefit from this research.

6. Please have a senior decision maker (e.g., assistant deputy minister, executive director) from your organization sign below to confirm that they approve this research question.

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<th>Senior Decision Maker Name</th>
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7. To be completed by Research Provider:

This request is:  
☐ Accepted  
☐ Declined  

Reason:  
☐ Referred to another organization:

The information supplied in this request form is not confidential and may be shared at the discretion of the ministry.
AHRQ 2012/13 Quarterly Workplan Report

Research Providers are asked to submit an update of the excel spreadsheet form quarterly to ResearchUnit@ontario.ca as per the fiscal quarters of the funding year:

- July 31st (for period of April 1 to June 30 – Q1)
- October 31st (for period of July 1 to September 30 – Q2)
- January 31st (for period of October 1 to December 31 – Q3)
- April 30th (for period of January 1 to March 31 – Q4)

Please complete both worksheets (list of questions and financial information).
### AHRQ Summary of Findings Form

Form to be completed by Research Provider upon completion of research activity for all type 2 and 3 research responses.

The information on this page will be kept internal to the MOHLTC; the information on the next page will be disseminated broadly.

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| Research start date |  |
| Research end date   |  |
AHRQ Summary of Findings Form

Applied Health Research Question:__________________________

Name of Research Provider Organization:_____________________

Type of Response (check one):

☐Research Report/ Technical Brief

Types of relevant evidence identified (check all that apply):
☐ Systematic review(s) (e.g., Cochrane reviews)
☐ Randomized controlled trial(s) (RCTs)
☐ Quantitative research other than RCTs in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., administrative database studies, experimenter controlled studies)
☐ Qualitative research in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., descriptive research)
☐ Grey literature (e.g., technical reports, working papers from research groups or committees, government reports, abstracts from conferences, proceedings)
☐ Commentary and editorial articles published in peer-reviewed journals
☐ Other (please specify):___________

☐Research Project

Methodology: [e.g., analyses of administrative data, randomized controlled trial, qualitative research, etc.]

Key Findings:

•