NATIONAL CLINICAL EVIDENCE TASKFORCE

National Clinical Evidence Taskforce Conflict of Interest Policy

Version 1.0

27 October 2022

Conflict of Interest policy

The NHMRC Act 1992 defines a conflict of interest as 'any direct or indirect pecuniary or non-pecuniary interest'. A conflict of interest does not preclude an individual's involvement within a particular group; however, to ensure the independence and integrity of decision-making processes and for transparency, all relevant interests must be declared and managed appropriately.

For further information on conflicts of interest, please visit the NHMRC 'Guidelines for Guidelines' website at:
https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelinesforguidelines/plan/identifying-and-managing-conflicts-interest

1. Scope of COI policy
The Conflicts of Interest (COI) policy applies to all individuals who participate in the decision-making process as it relates to the development of guidelines within the National Clinical Evidence Taskforce for urgent and emerging diseases. This includes but is not limited to: Members of the National Steering Committee, National Guidelines Leadership Group, Expert Guideline Panels, Consumer Panels, National Executive & Project Team, Evidence Team and the Expert Advisory Group and peer reviewers.

2. The process of disclosing COIs
Any individual who participates in decision making processes relating to work undertaken within the Taskforce is required to complete a 'Declarations of Interest' form and return it to a member of the Taskforce team either (a) prior to attending their first meeting (for members of committees, panels or other groups formed), or (b) either before or at the time of submission of comments/feedback in relation to a body of work (for example, peer reviewers). Individuals need to disclose all relevant interests within the previous five (5) years.

3. Identifying conflicts of interest
The completed 'Declarations of Interest' form for each individual will be reviewed by a member of the Taskforce team to determine if any entries within the form constitutes a conflict of interest. A Conflict Management Committee (CMC) will assess declarations if a potential conflict is indicated. The CMC will be comprised of individuals with expert knowledge of COI management. The chair of the CMC will make the final decision as to whether a conflict of interest requires the development of a management plan for that individual.

4. Management of conflicts of interest
Based on an assessment of individuals' conflicts of interests, a judgement will be made regarding that individuals' accepted level of participation within the guideline development group. A substantial conflict of interest, such as ongoing financial compensation by a private company with strong links to the topic of interest, will require that individual to cease their involvement within the group; however one-off $500 honorarium from a company making products not related to the topic of the guideline may be permitted. Individuals who have specific conflicts as relates to defined sections within a guideline (e.g. the individuals' spouse is employed by the manufacturer of a medical device that is the subject of a specific recommendation) may be required to leave the room and omit themselves from the decision making process for that topic. Any disagreements by an individual flagged as having a conflict of interest that precludes their involvement within a decision-making process should be raised with a member of the Taskforce team. This will then be reviewed by the CMC and a

decision made as to whether to uphold the decision to exclude the individual or overturn the decision and thereby allow the individual to participate in the decision-making process.

All declarations of interest and a description of how conflicts of interest were managed will be publicly available with the guideline.

5. As per NHMRC guidance, committee chairs should have no conflicts of interest and the majority (> 50%) of committee members should also be free of conflicts of interest.
In relation to disbursements over the preceding five years, individuals who were deemed to have significant conflicts met the following pre-specified criteria:

- Membership of advisory boards for corporations whose products or services are related to the guideline topics or that have a commercial or other interest in the Clinical Guideline for which the member is contributing to; or
- Received grants, whether single or multiple, from entities who had commercial interests in the clinical guideline topic to the cumulative value of $5000 or more per annum; or
- Received funding from entities that had commercial interest in the clinical guideline topic for consulting services or to present or attend conferences or meetings relating to the topic of the guideline to the cumulative value of $5000 or more per annum.