Understanding the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and its Conflicts of Interest Policies

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Overview

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force...

• Is an independent panel of non-Federal experts in prevention & evidence-based medicine

• Makes evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services, including screening, counseling, and preventive medications

  • Recommendations address only services offered in the primary care setting or services referred by a primary care clinician.

  • Recommendations apply to adults & children with no signs or symptoms (or unrecognized signs and symptoms)
Overview

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force...

• Makes recommendations based on rigorous review of existing peer-reviewed evidence
  • Does not conduct the research studies, but reviews & assesses the research
  • Evaluates benefits & harms of each service based on factors such as age & sex
USPSTF Members

- The 16 volunteer members represent disciplines of primary care including family medicine, internal medicine, nursing, obstetrics/gynecology, pediatrics, and behavioral medicine
- Led by a Chair & Vice Chairs
- Serve 4-year terms
- Appointed by AHRQ Director with guidance from Chair & Vice Chairs
- Undergo a rigorous review of potential conflicts of interest
- Current members include deans, medical directors, practicing clinicians, and professors
  - [www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/members.htm](http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/members.htm)
AHRQ’s Support of the Task Force

• AHRQ, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), provides administrative, scientific, technical, and dissemination support to the USPSTF.

• AHRQ’s Mission: to produce evidence to make health care safer, higher quality, more accessible, equitable, and affordable, and to work within HHS and with other partners to make sure that the evidence is understood and used.

• While AHRQ provides support to the USPSTF, it is important to note that the USPSTF is an independent entity.
USPSTF Recommendation Development Process

- Rigorous 4-stage recommendation development process:
  - Topic nomination
  - Draft and final research plans
  - Draft evidence review and recommendation statement
  - Final evidence review and recommendation statement
- 4-week public comment period on all draft materials
- The Task Force works with AHRQ Evidence-based Practice Centers (EPCs) to develop research plans and review evidence
- Subject matter experts are consulted throughout the recommendation development process
- Procedure Manual available under Methods and Processes at: www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org
USPSTF Conflicts of Interest Policies

• USPSTF requires each member to disclose any real or perceived financial and non-financial conflict(s) of interest for self, immediate family members, and close personal relationships.

• Financial conflicts include stocks, equity positions, consulting agreements, employment arrangements, or research grants/contracts, and travel reimbursement and honorariums sponsored by industry, advocacy or professional organizations.

• Non-financial conflicts include public comments and testimony, leadership role on a panel, substantial career efforts/interests, previously published opinions, and advocacy or policy positions.
Potential Financial Conflicts of Interest

• Task Force members report all financial relationships regardless of amount.

• Ownership of individual stocks (shares, options, warrants), and bonds or other debt or other significant proprietary interests or investments in any third party that could be affected by a USPSTF decision on a specific topic

• Having an employment, independent contractor or consulting relationship with an entity that could be financially or reputationally affected by a Task Force decision

• Receiving a proprietary research grant or receiving patents, royalties or licensing fees from such an entity
Potential Financial Conflicts of Interest

• Participating on an entity’s proprietary governing board or advisory council
• Participating in an entity’s speakers bureaus
• Receiving honoraria or travel from such an entity
• Receiving payment as an expert witness for a plaintiff or a defendant associated with such an entity
• Receiving remuneration for services with respect to transactions involving parties with a financial interest in the outcome of a USPSTF decision. This may include clinical specialty practice.
Potential Non-Financial Conflicts of Interest

- Could be numerous because Task Force members are chosen for their national reputations on prevention issues and their work may be very well-known.
- Users of Task Force products might doubt the objectivity of the process if such members are known to have taken leadership roles in discussion and vote on recommendations regarding that topic.
- Goal: to disclose and mitigate potential bias.
Potential Non-Financial Conflicts of Interest

Required to disclose substantial non-financial interests including:

• Public comments and testimony
• Leadership role on a panel
• Substantial career efforts/interests in a single area
• Previously published opinions
• Advocacy or policy positions
Process for Determining Appropriate Actions

• Prior to new member appointment and assignment on topics, all disclosures are reviewed by AHRQ and the Task Force Chairs according to the criteria specified in the USPSTF Procedure Manual and determined to be either Level 1, 2, or 3.

• Task Force Chairs determine the final action on the member's eligibility to participate on a specific topic based on the nature and significance of the potential COI.
Process for Determining Appropriate Actions

• **Level 1** disclosures include nonfinancial disclosures that would not affect the judgment of a Task Force member. These disclosures do not require any action.

• **Level 2** disclosures include financial disclosures of $1,000 or less and nonfinancial disclosures that are relevant to a topic but not anticipated to affect the judgment of the Task Force member for that topic. These disclosures are announced at the Task Force meeting, but do not limit the Task Force member’s participation in the topic process.
Process for Determining Appropriate Actions

• **Level 3** disclosures:

• Financial disclosures of a larger amount and significant nonfinancial disclosures that may affect the Task Force member's view on the topic.

• Actions for Level 3 disclosures vary according to the nature of the conflict, and may include preventing the member from serving on the workgroup of a topic, serving as a primary spokesperson for a topic, or preventing the member from taking part in all topic activities including voting.

• As all new Task Force members are reviewed for conflicts prior to joining, Level 3 disclosures are rare.
Thank you for your interest
www.USPreventiveServicesTaskForce.org