



Which Review Is Right For You? Choosing a Review Methodology

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INTRODUCTION

Systematic reviews (SRs) are characterized by standardized and defined methods (Figure 1). While SRs are regarded as the gold standard in healthcare evidence reviewing (and a requirement of many health technology assessments (HTAs)), other types of review also play an important role throughout a product's lifecycle.

Figure 1: What characterizes a systematic review?



METHODS

Systematic reviews are recommended when a comprehensive search and synthesis approach is required, for example in HTAs. They have highly structured methods, emphasizing bias minimization, transparency and replicability.

"Rapid", "pragmatic" or "targeted" reviews are increasingly popular due to their accelerated timelines and reduced costs, with methodological shortcuts possible at various stages.

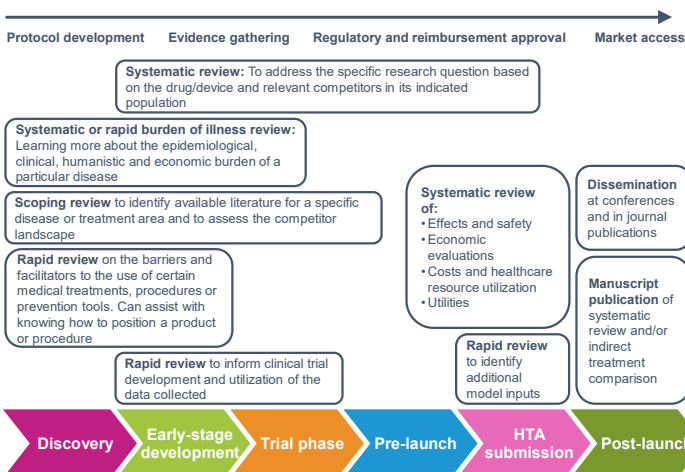
Scoping reviews explore what is known about a topic, and typically have a broad research question.

"Reviews of reviews" or "overviews" identify existing SRs on an established topic.

Finally, **living reviews** follow the same process as an SR or rapid review but incorporate new evidence on a continual or regular basis.

Figure 2 describes where the various review types can fit into the HTA process for a new product.

Figure 2: Where do reviews fit in the HTA process?



RESULTS

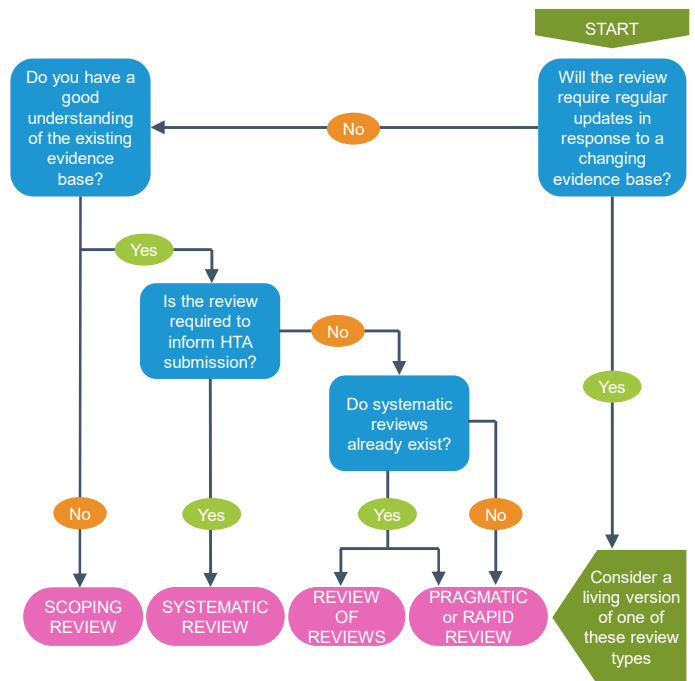
"Rapid" reviews may be appropriate when flexibility exists regarding the scope and review methods. Any limitations due to methodological shortcuts must be acknowledged in a transparent manner.

Scoping reviews are useful for pioneering research ahead of a systematic review, or early in a product's development phase, when an overall understanding of the evidence base is required.

"Reviews of reviews" are particularly useful when the size of the primary study literature means that a review of primary studies would be unfeasible.

Living reviews are best suited to topics where the evidence-base is changing rapidly, or the best information is needed quickly.

Figure 3: Which review is right for me?



CONCLUSIONS

When considering conducting or commissioning a review, organizations should consider the intended audience for the review, the resources, time and budget available, and the size of the existing literature.

Although systematic reviews remain the gold standard, a rapid review, scoping review, or review of reviews may offer a more suitable way to approach a given research question.

Regardless of the type of review conducted, it is critical that authors provide transparent and comprehensive reporting of their chosen review methods, particularly when submitting a review for publication in a peer reviewed journal.

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