

## **ADDENDUM: Conflict of Interest - Clinical Practice Guidelines**

The AARC strives to attain the highest levels of objectivity and to ensure user confidence in the quality and trustworthiness of AARC Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPG) content. Any relationships and how they may be determined to be a conflict of interest (COI) must be disclosed. This relates to healthcare consumers and the public, practitioners, policymakers, healthcare managers, researchers, and research funders.

This addendum to the AARC COI policy provides an approach to managing COI in the development of AARC clinical practice guidelines that is consistent with the expectations of the guideline development community, health care professionals and public, including the need to maximize consideration of evidence and expert opinions in a manner that ensures independent analysis, independent decision-making, and high confidence in guideline quality and integrity.

### **Requirements:**

#### **1. Disclosure**

- A.** All individuals who are invited to participate in a guideline development panel must disclose to the AARC all relationships and, if the guideline is co-sponsored by another society, to that society if requested. Approved panelists must also disclose their relationships to the other panel members at the beginning of each meeting. The AARC will review declared relationships and determine whether these relationships cause conflicts. If a conflict is present, the AARC will determine whether these conflicts are manageable for the panel and, if so, how they should be managed.
- B.** Disclosures must be made prior to the commencement of guideline development and then updated annually. If a new relationship arises during guideline development, it must be disclosed immediately. It is advised that approved panelists consult the organization leader appointed to oversee the development and stewardship of Clinical Practice Guidelines (herein referred to as “executive office designee”) prior to engaging in any activity that may result in a COI related to guideline development.

- C. Panelists must disclose the following relationships if held by them or familial connection at the time they are invited to participate in the guideline panel or if held during the preceding 24 months. Examples include:
1. Professional or financial relationships with a company known to have a business interest in the subject matter of the guideline.
  2. Ownership of intellectual property (including patents or patents pending) that is related to guideline content.
  3. Panelist's affiliation in which the outcome could either help or harm their professional work or group (e.g., employer, association).

## 2. Review and Categorization of Conflicts of Interest

The relationship disclosures of individuals who are invited to participate in an AARC guideline development panel are reviewed by the AARC executive office designee. Disclosures needing further review will be escalated to the AARC President, who may then engage the Judicial Committee for evaluation and advice as needed.

Based upon their disclosures, proposed panelists are considered as either free from relevant COI, having manageable COI, or having disqualifying COI. Proposed panelists having disqualifying COI must terminate these relationships in order to serve as a member of the guideline panel. In the case of limited experts in the subject matter, individuals that have disqualifying COI may be permitted by the AARC to participate as a non-voting expert contributor.

- A. **No Relevant Conflicts of Interest:** Individuals classified with no relevant COI are approved for full participation, including determining the scope and health care questions to be addressed in the guidelines, reviewing and discussing the evidence, formulating and grading recommendations, voting on recommendations, and writing the document.
- a. Research funding that is free of direct or indirect industry funding or control, such as that provided by a government program or a non-profit organization that does not receive industry funding and uses an award mechanism and oversight that is independent of industry, is not regarded to be a conflict of interest.
  - b. Service on a data and safety monitoring board for such research is also not regarded as a conflict of interest.
- B. **Manageable Conflicts of Interest:** COI that requires management include:
- a. Research funding from an industry grant that is paid to the participant's institution and related to the content of the guideline.

- b. Research funding from a government program or non-profit organization that receives funding from industry with business interests in the content of the guideline.
- c. Participation on a data and safety monitoring board concerned with research that is relevant to the content of the guideline and is funded by an industry with business interests in the content of the guideline, or by a government program or non-profit organization that receives funding from industry with business interests in the content of the guideline.
- d. Participation in industry-funded research, scientific advisory committees, consulting roles, non-promotional speaking engagements, or expert testimony on matters that are unrelated to guideline subject matter, but the company involved is known to have business interest in the guideline subject matter. For example, a CPG panelist who is on a speakers bureau for a company that sells products in field of the research.
- e. Intellectual conflict, such as a potential recommendation of the guideline would jeopardize or enhance the panelist's professional work or professional group fundamentally.

Individuals with a manageable conflict will be permitted to participate in discussions about the evidence, but must attest that the intellectual conflict will not bias their participation in the panel, and may be required by the AARC to excuse themselves or be recused from decision making on relevant recommendations if the AARC executive office designee thinks that there is a high likelihood that guideline readers would regard the individual's direct participation in decision-making on the relevant recommendation as lessening reader confidence that the recommendation was developed in a manner independent of any financial or intellectual consequences for panelists.

Determination of the need for excusal or recusal of panelists with a manageable conflict as defined above will be made by the AARC executive office designee in consultation with the AARC President.

It is the responsibility of the guideline panel lead(s) to ensure that individuals with manageable conflicts are excused or recused as described above.

**C. Disqualifying Conflicts of Interest:** COI that cause disqualification for membership on an AARC guideline panel include:

- a. Delivery of non-promotional talks regardless of if the speaker declares they have full control of the content and is either unpaid or paid.
- b. A direct financial relationship with a commercial entity that has an interest in the content of the guideline (a "relevant company"), exclusive of the research and data and safety monitoring board activities noted above. Such direct financial relationships include the following, whether paid to or held by the individual directly or issued to another entity at the direction of the individual (such as to a panelist's institution):
  - i. Payment of wages, consulting fees, honoraria, or other payments (in cash, in stock or stock options, or in kind) by a relevant company as compensation for the individual's services or expertise, excluding the research and data and safety monitoring board activities noted above. Examples of such services are: participation on relevant scientific advisory committees; consulting; speaking engagements and inclusion in industry-affiliated speaker bureaus; expert testimony on matters related to guideline content provided on behalf of a relevant company or a law firm representing a relevant company; employment by a relevant commercial entity (such as a relevant pharmaceutical or medical device company or a third party payer that has financial interests in guideline content).
  - ii. Investments in relevant companies by the panelist or the panelist's familial connection (exclusive of general mutual funds).
  - iii. A patent or other intellectual property that is relevant to the guideline's subject matter and has resulted or could result in payments to the panelist or the panelist's institution.
- c. Proposed panelists with disqualifying COI will be notified by the AARC executive office designee. The disqualified panelist may be permitted to serve if the disclosed relationship is terminated prior to when the panel begins its work. Permission requires consideration of the matter by the AARC executive office designee in consultation with the AARC Judicial Committee. The proposed panelist will follow AARC

requirements for remediation of the disqualifying relationship. The AARC President will be notified of the proposed panelist's status during this process. These requirements include:

- i. Termination of the COI as far in advance of panel activity as possible to avoid any appearance of influence on panel participation, and
- ii. The panelist will inform the AARC executive office designee if they enter into a disqualifying relationship at any time, up to one year following publication of the guideline.

**D. Non-voting Expert Consultants:** AARC recognizes that experts in the subject matter of a guideline may be unable to serve as AARC guideline panelists due to financial relationships that cause disqualification. These experts may participate as "non-voting expert contributors" to the guideline. They may participate in discussions of the evidence related to their specific expertise but will not participate in discussions about any recommendations. Non-voting expert contributors must meet all AARC disclosure requirements (as stated earlier for panelists) and be approved by the AARC executive office designee in consultation with the AARC Judicial Committee, prior to any participation.

### **3. Guideline Development Panel Composition**

The guideline panel lead(s) and the majority ( $\geq 50\%$ ) of the guideline development panel members must be free from relevant conflicts of interest. The majority threshold is meant to be the minimal acceptable standard; guideline development panels should strive to maintain as large a proportion of individuals free from relevant COI as possible, while maintaining the necessary expertise to develop the guidelines.

### **4. FAILURE TO DISCLOSE**

Any guideline panel member who is suspected of failing to disclose an existing or new relationship will be reported to the AARC executive office designee and asked to update their disclosures. Failure to disclose will be reported to the AARC Judicial Committee and Executive Committee, and may result in penalties including, but not limited to, the following:

- A. Immediate removal from the guideline development panel.
- B. Elimination of any opportunities for authorship associated with the guideline.

- C. Disqualification from participation in any future AARC clinical practice guidelines or other official AARC activities.
- D. Termination of the panel member's membership in the AARC.

## REFERENCES

1. American Thoracic Society (2015). Policy for Management of Financial Conflicts of Interest in the Development of ATS Clinical Practice Guidelines. Retrieved from [cpg-specific-coi-policy.pdf](#)
2. CHEST (2024). CHEST Relationship Policy for Guideline/Consensus Statement. Retrieved from [Guideline Relationship COI Policy](#)
3. National Academies Science, Engineering, and Medicine. Institute of Medicine Clinical Practice Guidelines We Can Trust (2011). Retrieved from [Clinical Practice Guidelines We Can Trust | The National Academies Press](#)
4. Society for Critical Care Medicine Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) Manual for Evidence-Based Guidelines and Practice Parameter Statements. 2025. Retrieved from <https://www.sccm.org/guidelines-development> | [SCCM](#)