

3.2 Development of a protocol for a systematic review of effectiveness evidence

An *a priori* systematic review protocol is important because it pre-defines the objectives and methods of the systematic review. A review protocol provides the plan or proposal for the systematic review. Any deviations from the review protocol should be discussed in the systematic review report.

The review protocol describes:

- the context and rationale for the review, including what is already known and uncertainties,
- the study selection criteria (inclusion/exclusion criteria),
- the outcome measures, interventions, and comparisons considered,
- the proposed search strategy for identifying relevant studies,
- the procedures for study selection,
- the critical appraisal process and instruments,
- the data extraction process and instruments,
- the process for resolving disagreement between reviewers in study selection, data extraction, and critical appraisal decisions, and
- the proposed approaches to synthesis