
SYSTEMATIC REVIEWS

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS 2009 (Revised)

Proposal Deadline: June 29, 2009

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I. Introduction

This request for proposals is for systematic reviews on specific research issues identified by WorkSafeBC. The purpose of this competition is to develop a better understanding of the present state of knowledge on specific issues of priority to WorkSafeBC by soliciting proposals to: synthesize the existing research; provide critical assessment of the present knowledge level; and, possibly identify future knowledge needs in each of the areas specified. Prospective authors should have experience in conducting systematic reviews and expertise with the issues at hand.

Project duration is not to exceed one year.

II. Background

WorkSafeBC is dedicated to achieving a vision of workers and workplaces safe and secure from injury, illness and disease. In order to achieve this vision, WorkSafeBC must encourage and support the development and use of the best scientific evidence on the range of issues that workers, employers and the organization itself face concerning workplace health and safety.

The mandate of WorkSafeBC, in concert with workers and employers, is to:

- Promote the prevention of workplace injury, illness, and disease
- Rehabilitate those who are injured and provide timely return to work
- Provide fair compensation to replace workers' loss of wages while recovering from injuries
- Ensure sound financial management for a viable workers' compensation system

The Research Secretariat is a department within WorkSafeBC created and designed to support research, and the transfer of knowledge that will contribute to WorkSafeBC's mandate. It does so by administering WorkSafeBC's research program FOCUS ON TOMORROW, through which systematic reviews solicited under this RFP will be funded.

III. Objectives

Objectives of this RFP include complete systematic reviews of available literature addressing each of the research issues/questions presented in this document.

For the purpose of this RFP, a systematic review is considered to be a review of a clearly formulated question that uses systematic and explicit methods to identify, select and critically appraise relevant research, and to collect and analyze data from the studies that are included in the review. Methods used should also minimize bias and ensure that results are reproducible. Statistical methods (meta-analysis) may or may not, depending on appropriateness, be used to analyze and summarize the results of the included studies.

Systematic reviews differ from other types of literature review in that they adhere to a strict scientific design in order to make them more comprehensive, to minimize the chance of bias, and to ensure their reliability. Rather than reflecting the views of the authors or being based on only a (possibly

biased) selection of the published literature, they contain a comprehensive summary of the available evidence.

To be considered a systematic review, the authors must clearly state the topic of the review, how the evidence was retrieved and from what sources (i.e., name the databases), and provide explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure quality of evidence. (It is also important that eligibility criteria are explicit so that the assessments can be scrutinized and replicated if necessary.) The project plan must involve highly trained personnel, independent assessments, explicit definitions, third-party arbitration of differences between reviewers, and use of a large and complete database.

The Bradford Hill criteria of causality are included in WorkSafeBC's "[Protocol for the Assessment of Medical/Scientific Information](#) — Industrial Diseases Standing Committee Workers' Compensation Board of British Columbia". (Please scroll down to this title provided in the link.) This protocol should also be considered, where relevant to the research.

More information on expectations under this RFP can be found below in sections V and VI. In addition, the Cochrane Collaboration provides a fairly prescriptive format for systematic reviews that applicants may wish to consult and adapt to specific needs.

IV. The Research Issues/Questions

The specific research issues/questions for this RFP are presented below. It is understood that the questions presented may need to be refined in the proposal. Proposals for scoping reviews will also be considered if appropriate.

1. Issue: **Multiple Sclerosis as a Compensable Consequence**

WorkSafeBC policy provides that "While the cause of multiple sclerosis is unknown, there has been much medical literature on factors which may precipitate the onset of the disease in an already predisposed person. One of these factors is a traumatic injury."

Questions have been raised on whether there is scientific evidence to support the existence of a causal relationship between a traumatic injury and multiple sclerosis. In response, the following questions are posed:

- A. What is the causal relationship, if any, between a work-related traumatic injury and the development of multiple sclerosis?
- B. If there is a causal relationship, what factors would indicate that multiple sclerosis was precipitated by the traumatic injury?

2. Issue: **Primary Cancer of the Skin as described in Schedule B of the *BC Workers Compensation Act***

Schedule B of the *BC Workers Compensation Act* (the "Act") provides a presumption of work causation in favour of a worker who has primary cancer of the skin:

- *Primary cancer of the skin – where there is prolonged contact with coal tar products, arsenic or cutting oils or prolonged exposure to solar ultraviolet light.*

- A. Is the description noted in Schedule B of the *Act* as described above, current and scientifically supportable? That is, is the description of the process or industry accurate, comprehensive and does it reflect current science with respect to each of the types of skin cancer known to be work-related?
- B. What is the causal relationship, if any, between work-related contacts or exposures and the development of specific skin cancers? In addition, what are the relevant non-work causes of the specific types of skin cancer?
- C. If a causal relationship with work-related contacts or exposures is found, what are the risk factors and latency periods for each type of skin cancer? In addition, what are the relevant diagnostic tools that may be used to detect each type of skin cancer?
- D. Is direct contact or exposure at the site of the malignant skin lesion(s) required in order for the onset of each specific skin cancer? More specifically, does there need to be prolonged direct contact or exposure to that site from the occupation before it should be considered to be work caused? Can the skin cancer be due to absorption (at other skin sites) or inhalation and still be considered to be work caused?

V. Proposal Submission/Research Plan

In general, the research plan should be a brief summary of the topic of the study, a summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria, a list of the appropriate publications, sources and methods the researchers will use for identifying materials and a 'brainstorm' of associations or concepts related to the research topic.

The following information, where applicable, should be included in the submission, and must be no more than fifteen pages:

1. General information about the planned project team, the involvement of any partner organizations, the academic researchers, and other confirmed or anticipated participants (include respective information on relevant expertise and experience conducting systematic reviews) – the project team would normally involve a research team that includes university faculty members, graduate and/or professional students, professional practitioners and methodology/information specialists
2. Project description with goals and objectives
3. A detailed strategic plan (research design and methods) for conducting the systematic review including the following:
 - a. How the search will be conducted
 - b. Kinds of databases and resources to be used
 - c. Criteria used for selecting resources and for measuring quality of studies – how the researchers will rate the strength of evidence in each study
 - d. How the analysis (critical assessment) will be done and how it will be determined that relationships exist, and can be substantiated, to reach possible conclusions – whether generally accepted scientific guidelines on association and assignment of causation will be used (for example, the Bradford Hill Criteria) and/or whether a meta-analysis will be included
4. Project budget with specific detail on how funds will be utilized
5. Project workplan, including major milestones, together with a statement of overall funding requirements related to the achievement of these milestones (should also include provision for

periodic discussion with WorkSafeBC staff to address adjustments, if any, to the research plan, including the research question)

Use additional pages as necessary to include curriculum vitae of key project personnel.

VI. Final Report

The final product will be a systematic review including the following elements:

1. Background including the research question(s) and project description
2. Project goals and objectives
3. Search strategy for sources of evidence, including information on the databases and resources used
4. Selection criteria for quality of evidence (inclusion and exclusion criteria)
5. Data collection and analysis (critical assessment), including statistical pooling or meta-analysis of data, if applicable
6. Main results and/or main conclusions of the review in answering the initial research question(s)
7. Implications for further research
8. Authors' conclusion
9. Citations

The analysis must include interpretative commentary with respect to sources of error, bias and confounders in the reviewed studies. The analysis should also address, where possible, the question of whether it is plausible that the findings could be due to unrecognized confounders.

Intellectual Property Rights

WorkSafeBC does not claim any ownership of intellectual property developed under WorkSafeBC research funding. Any intellectual property produced by the applicant in carrying out the final report shall remain the property of the applicant. The applicant will agree to duly and prominently acknowledge WorkSafeBC in any media releases, journal articles, publication, presentation, or any other public mention. The applicant will also agree, upon request, to permit WorkSafeBC to examine and copy any findings, data, or conclusions resulting from the research prior to publication. WorkSafeBC will be mindful of, and avoid to the extent possible, jeopardizing the applicant's publishing potential.

VII. Eligibility

Researchers worldwide are eligible. Principal investigators, affiliated with a qualified organization, that are knowledgeable and experienced in the method of systematic review, who have demonstrated track record in research, and who have published studies related to the research question(s) are encouraged to apply. Full-time employees of WorkSafeBC are not eligible to be principal investigators; however, they may participate as co-investigators of proposals under this RFP.

VIII. How to Apply

Notice of Intent

Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to first submit (by e-mail) a notice of their intention to apply for funding. The notice of intent is due by **May 25, 2009**, and should include:

- Research issue/question under review
- Name, address and telephone number of the principal investigator, and
- Identities of other key personnel and participating institutions

Although the notice of intent is not binding and will not be used in the review of the proposal, the Research Secretariat will use the information it contains to estimate workload and to identify potential reviewers.

Submission Requirements and Deadline

- Proposals must be submitted in hard copy and received by **4 pm, June 29, 2009**. An electronic (Microsoft® Office Word) version should also be sent by email. Proposals that are incomplete will be returned to the applicant without further consideration. If a proposal is received after the due date, it will be returned to the applicant without review.
- Each page must be single-sided and numbered. Do not bind or staple.
- No additional materials such as videos are permitted (as these items will not be duplicated or submitted for peer review).
- A Final Report is due no later than one year after the project commencement date.

Submit proposals addressed as follows:

Research Secretariat
WorkSafeBC
Level 2 Main Building
6951 Westminster Highway
Richmond BC V7C 1C6

Allowable Costs

Applicants must provide a detailed budget, with accompanying justification for all operating expenses. The budget must be consistent with the stated objectives and planned activities for the project. Overhead costs such as office space, light, heat, and utilities will not be included for funding. Salary support for graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, research associates, technical and professional assistants may be permitted; however, salary support for any person holding an academic rank equivalent to Lecturer, Assistant Professor, or higher, and who is the principal investigator representing the education institution for which he/she is employed, is not permitted.

Use and Disclosure of Personal Information Consent

A signed [Use and Disclosure of Personal Information Consent Form](#) must be attached to the proposal for each project team member whose personal information is included in the application.

Conflict of Interest

Applicants are expected to disclose any possible conflict of interest capable of influencing their judgments, including personal, political, academic and financial.

Award Criteria

The Research Secretariat awards research funds on a competitive basis. All proposals submitted in response to this RFP will compete for available funds with all other proposals. Only one research proposal passing evaluation (see section below) may be selected per issue/question presented in this RFP. Should all proposals exceed the WorkSafeBC's set budget or not receive approval, WorkSafeBC reserves the right not to accept any proposals.

Evaluation Process and Criteria for Peer Review

Research proposals submitted to the Research Secretariat are evaluated in a three-stage process. This process is designed to be scientifically credible, transparent and accountable.

The first stage is a preliminary review by the Research Secretariat, the second stage is a peer review by experts, and the third stage is a review by a committee of WorkSafeBC staff.

Upon receipt, the Research Secretariat will review all applications for completeness and for compliance with the parameters of this competition. Proposals that are not complete, do not provide adequate information in the required sections, exceed length limitations or are otherwise in a form that is unacceptable for peer review, will be returned to the applicant without further consideration. Proposals that are complete and that comply with this RFP will then be evaluated by peer reviewers. Peer reviewers are asked to assess the project's scientific merit, feasibility, and budget.

Applications that pass peer review will then be reviewed by a committee of WorkSafeBC staff for a recommendation on funding.

Final authority on funding approval rests with WorkSafeBC's Board of Directors.

Overall, the primary criteria for funding will include:

- Technical soundness of the proposed research plan, including feasibility of timelines
- Experience of the principal investigator and the project team
- The institutional environment and support for the project

Notification of Applicants

The Research Secretariat will notify the successful applicants and the names of the individual researchers and research team members will be posted on the WorkSafeBC's website.

For Further Information, Contact the Research Secretariat:

Phone: 604 244-6300

Fax: 604 244-6295

E-mail: resquery@worksafebc.com

Website: http://www.worksafebc.com/contact_us/research/default.asp