

Evolving the Academy Position Paper Process: Commitment to Evidence-Based Practice



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THE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION and Dietetics (Academy) is dedicated to supporting evidence-based practice and recommends that nutrition and dietetics practitioners utilize evidence-based principles and current scientific evidence within their practice. To assist practitioners in achieving this, the Academy provided members with resources, including Evidence-Based Nutrition Practice Guidelines (EBNPGs), systematic reviews, position papers, and practice papers. These resources were designed to inform Academy members of the latest research on specific topics in the field of nutrition and to assist with implementation of evidence-based principles into daily practice.

In an effort to provide the highest-quality resources to its membership, the Academy is implementing changes to ensure that future Academy position papers adhere to the highest evidence-based standards. In fiscal year 2015-2016, the management of the Academy's Positions Committee (APC) moved from the Academy's Governance team to the Research, International, and Scientific Affairs (RISA) team. This transition provided an excellent opportunity to evaluate the efforts of the APC, the development process for position papers, and determine how to best align the APC's deliverables (position papers) with the RISA team's deliverables, including systematic reviews and EBNPGs.

For the evaluation process, a benchmarking study was conducted consisting of member surveys; review of the paper development process; interviews with staff, committee

members, and authors; and a review of how other professional organizations develop their position papers. This benchmarking revealed that there was confusion among members on the difference between a position paper and a practice paper. In addition, an internal review found that Academy position papers have been developed from narrative literature reviews instead of systematic reviews. Narrative reviews do not include or consider the entirety of evidence on a topic; are not protocol-based; and do not allow for a critical appraisal of study biases. These limitations result in narrative reviews being based on author interpretation of the studies.

An additional survey of 1,122 *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* (JAND) readers revealed that 80% of surveyed members regularly seek out position papers in JAND.¹ Members view position papers as very valuable and, according to JAND metrics, the Academy position papers frequently make the list of most viewed articles. Therefore, ensuring that position papers are systematically developed is critical to the Academy.

NEW PROCESS OF THE ACADEMY POSITION PAPER

Evaluation of the findings of the benchmarking study and review of the position paper development process prompted the Academy's House of Delegates Leadership Team to approve the following changes:

1. practice papers will no longer be published; and
2. future Academy position papers will be generated from an Evidence Analysis Library (EAL) systematic review.

The Academy's EAL has a rigorous, and highly-respected, process² for conducting systematic reviews and has

been publishing systematic reviews and EBNPGs on a wide range of nutrition topics since 2004. To meet the proposed changes in the position paper development, the EAL team developed a framework (see [Figure 1](#)) to determine when a systematic review should be conducted and whether an EBNPG or position paper should be developed from the systematic review. The steps for developing evidence-based papers are as follows:

1. A scoping review will be conducted on the proposed topic to provide an overview of current literature on a topic and to assist in determining whether a systematic review is warranted.
2. A systematic review will be conducted if the scoping review reveals a sufficient amount of scientific literature.
3. An EBNPG will be developed if the proposed topic has multiple subtopics and requires guidance/formal recommendations for practitioners.
4. A position paper will be developed if the proposed topic is controversial, confusing, important for policy, or requires clarification AND if the systematic review conclusion statement has high-quality evidence—Grade I or Grade II ([Figure 2](#)).
5. If the quality of evidence of the systematic review is Grade III or lower, a consensus statement will be generated to inform practitioners, but it will not guide practice.

PILOT TESTING

Over the past year, the Academy has been involved in pilot testing two new initiatives:

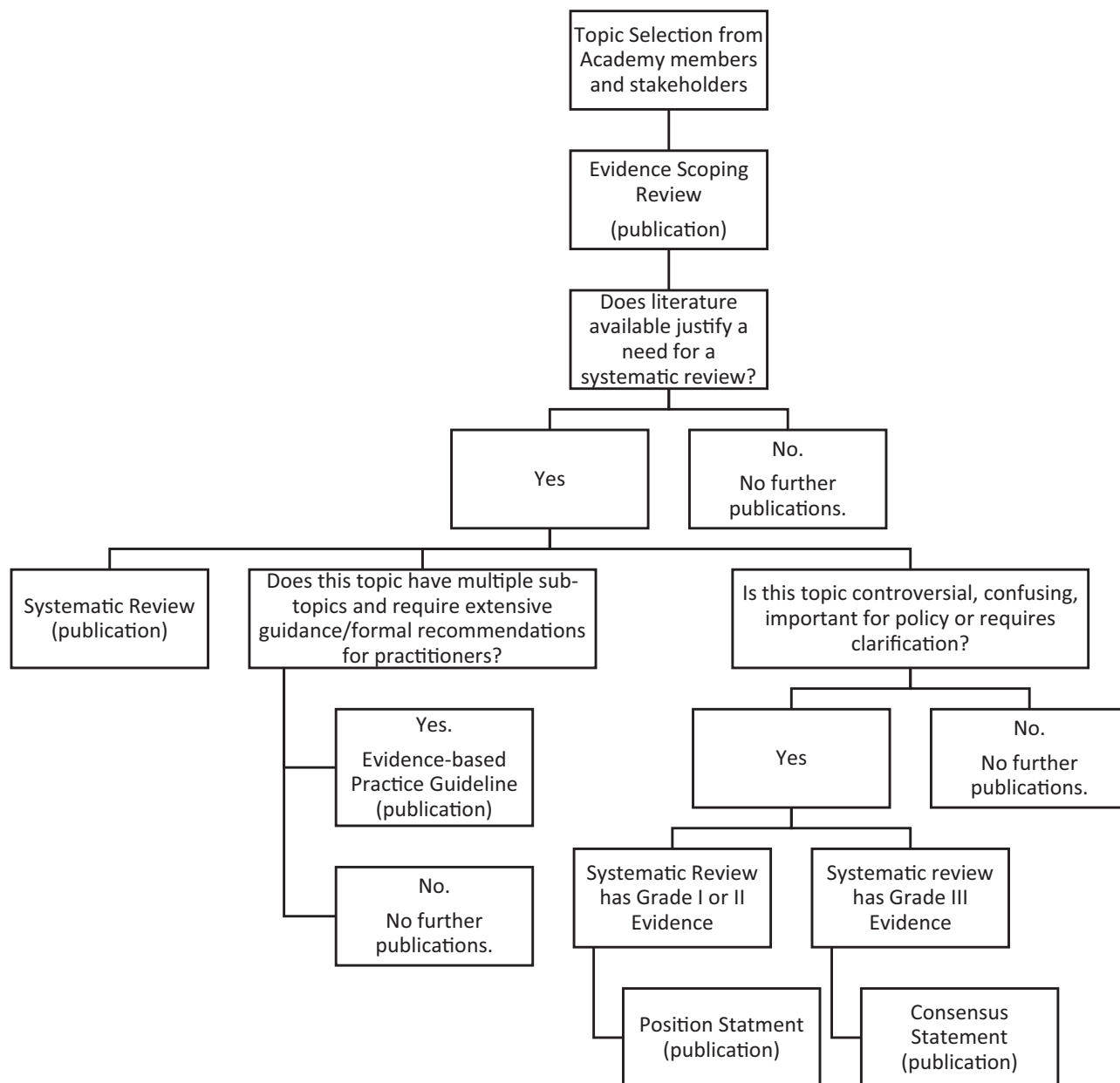


Figure 1. Decision framework for Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics evidence-based papers.

1. development of an evidence-based position paper; and
2. development of a consensus statement.

The first evidence-based position paper is currently in development, following the final phase of a systematic review on the topic of nutrition screening in adults. Grading of the conclusion statements for this project is completed and the workgroup is developing the position paper statement, which will be

published in JAND. The second initiative is to test the development of a consensus statement on the topic of nutritional genomics. A scoping review was conducted, and the authors and stakeholders determined that there is a sufficient amount of literature on the topic to warrant a systematic review.

The findings of these pilot tests indicate significant benefits to improving the process, such as reduction in duplicity, increase in efficiency, decrease in risk of bias, improved overall quality of

the final product, and, most importantly, the final products will adhere to evidence-based standards.

The new evidence-based position papers will also have a new format. Previous position papers were approximately 6,000 words in length. The new position papers will be shorter in length (1 to 2 pages), more focused, concise, and based on a systematic review. This new format is a result of the benchmarking study which indicated the length of position papers of other organizations were much shorter.

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