



## NIH Consensus Development Program

### Introduction

The National Institutes of Health Consensus Development Program has been organizing major conferences since 1977. The Program creates evidence-based consensus statements addressing controversial issues in medicine that are important to health care providers, policymakers, patients, researchers, and the general public. The NIH Consensus Program holds an average of three conferences a year. The Program is administered by the Office of Medical Applications of Research, within the NIH Office of the Director. Typically, the conferences have one major NIH Institute or Center sponsor, with multiple cosponsoring agencies.

### Topic Selection

NIH Consensus Development Conferences must satisfy the following criteria:

- Broad public health importance. The severity of the problem and the feasibility of interventions are key considerations.
- Controversy or unresolved issues can be clarified, or a gap between current knowledge and practice can be narrowed.
- There is an adequately defined base of scientific information from which to answer conference questions.
- The outcome must not depend primarily on subjective judgments of panelists.

### Conference Type

There are two types of conferences which fall under the purview of the Consensus Development Program: a State-of-the-Science Conference, or a Consensus Development Conference. Both types of conference have the same structure and methodology; they differ only in the strength of the evidence surrounding the topic in question. When it appears that there is very good evidence about a particular medical topic, but that the information has not been taken up into widespread clinical practice, a Consensus Development Conference is typically chosen, in order to consolidate, solidify, and broadly disseminate a strong evidence-based recommendation for general practice. Conversely, when a medical issue has weak or contradictory evidence, or practice habits not based in high-quality evidence are wide-spread, a State-of-the-Science Conference is chosen in order to highlight what evidence about a topic is available, the directions future research should take, and to alert physicians that certain practices do not have good data to support them.

### Promotion & Dissemination

The Consensus Development Statements have robust dissemination support:

- CME is available during and after the conference
- A press conference is held the last day of the conference—panel members are frequently interviewed for television, radio, and newspapers
- The statement is published both online at <http://consensus.nih.gov>
- Print copies are mailed to a wide variety of targeted audiences
- The statement and evidence report are published in a major peer-reviewed journal

## Conference Format

The conferences are held over a two and a half day period. Before the conference, a systematic evidence review on the chosen topic is performed by one of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's Evidence-Based Practice Centers. This report is distributed to the panel members approximately six weeks before the conference, and posted to the OMAR website once the conference begins, to serve as a foundation of high-quality evidence upon which the conference will build. The first day and a half of the conference consist of plenary sessions in which invited expert speakers present information, followed by "town hall forums," in which open discussion occurs among the speakers, panelists, and the general public in attendance. The panel then creates a draft of the consensus statement on the afternoon and evening of the second day, and presents it on the morning of the third day for audience commentary. On the basis of these comments the statement is modified and finalized by the panel. The program ends with a press conference, during which reporters are invited to question the panelists about their conclusions.

## Contact Us

For conference schedules, past statements and evidence reports, please contact us:

NIH Consensus Development Program  
Information Center  
P.O. Box 2577  
Kensington, MD 20891

1-888-NIH-CONSENSUS (888-644-2667)  
<http://consensus.nih.gov>

## Panelists

The panel is comprised of twelve to sixteen members that can give balanced, objective, and informed attention to the topic; they are chosen based upon the following criteria:

- Non-government employee, non-advocacy member
- No financial interests in the topic
- Knowledgeable in the general area of interest, but must not have published about or have a publicly stated opinion on the topic
- Come from a wide array of training:
  - Biostatisticians and epidemiologists
  - Clinical trialists and researchers
  - Practicing and academic health professionals of all specialties
  - Public representatives (ethicists, economists, attorneys, etc.)
- Appropriately reflect racial and ethnic diversity

## Speakers

There are approximately twenty-one speakers during the conference; three of these present the information found in the Evidence Based Practice Center's systematic review of the literature. The other eighteen are experts in the topic at hand, have likely published on the topic, and may have strong opinions or beliefs. Where multiple viewpoints on the topic exist, every effort is made to include speakers that address all sides of the issue.

