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Healthy People 2020 Structured Evidence Queries for PubMed: Practice Informed by Research

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Introduction

Healthy People 2020 (HP2020), from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), provides national objectives to guide health promotion and disease prevention efforts in the United States. The objectives provide a framework to monitor and measure improvements in health status of the American population over the decade from 2010 to 2020.

Public health professionals and policy makers may lack experience and find it difficult to identify relevant research evidence to develop interventions to improve health outcomes.

Purpose

The purpose of the HP2020 Structured Evidence Queries (SEQs) is to reduce the time and increase the precision of finding and accessing research literature to support the development of evidence-based actions to achieve HP2020 objectives. The National Library of Medicine collaborated with the HHS Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion to develop structured evidence queries (pre-formulated search strategies) of PubMed to retrieve citations to published research evidence relevant to Healthy People objectives.

Methods

The structured queries were developed by librarians, working in consultation with subject matter experts in public health. The librarians selected Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) and text words to develop optimal search strategies to retrieve articles on achieving specific Healthy People objectives.

Subject matter experts from the Healthy People Workgroup reviewed each search query. The expert reviewers worked with librarians to refine the search strategies to retrieve relevant articles and exclude unrelated articles.

Outcomes

The Healthy People 2020 Structured Evidence Queries site is organized by HP2020 topic areas. At the current time, the 289 evidence queries for 289 health objectives in 23 topic areas have been formulated by librarians and reviewed by subject experts. 116 additional SEQs in 7 topic areas are undergoing expert review and available in beta version.

The site also provides search queries for the Healthy People 2020 Leading Health Indicators, a subset of high priority health issues that represent significant threats to the public’s health.

Development of the search queries was an iterative process that often required several revisions of a specific strategy to find the optimal balance of including as many relevant citations as possible while minimizing the number of irrelevant citations. Searches were often limited by date to provide the most current information and to return a manageable number of citations.

Conclusion

The HP2020 SEQs provide peer-reviewed research evidence to support national objectives for improving the health of all Americans. The search queries will be periodically updated and refined and will ultimately be available for all Healthy People 2020 objectives.

The resource is the outcome of an effective partnership between librarians, public health professionals, and subject experts.