

Cochrane Ireland

IMPACT

1. Greater capacity for the production of synthesised evidence
2. Raised awareness of the importance of evidence synthesis among the public, clinicians and policymakers
3. Advancement of evidence synthesis methodology through primary research
4. Irish researchers as leaders in evidence synthesis contribution to policy and practice



Photo 1. The first Introduction to Cochrane Systematic Review workshop, Feb 2019 (Galway).

OVERVIEW

Cochrane Ireland's mission is to **promote evidence-informed health decision-making** by producing high-quality, relevant, accessible systematic reviews. Cochrane Ireland, hosted within Evidence Synthesis Ireland, promotes Cochrane's strategic priorities on the island of Ireland, facilitates engagement with stakeholders to improve the dissemination of Cochrane reviews, and strengthens Ireland's evidence synthesis capabilities for informed decision-making.

DESCRIPTION

Though many outputs and impacts are referenced in the other three case studies, here we expand on the specific impact of Cochrane Ireland under the stewardship of ESI since December 2018. Cochrane Ireland has **increased the number of people trained in Cochrane methodologies**, developed **greater reach** on communication channels and enabled **stronger international collaboration**.

Cochrane publications on the Island of Ireland from 2019 to 2020

From April 2020 to March 2021, 21 authors from Northern Ireland completed 16 Cochrane publications (2 protocols, 10 reviews, 4 review updates) and 78 authors from Ireland completed **35** Cochrane publications (9 protocols, 19 reviews, 7 review updates)¹. Of those, our immediate network (2 authors from Northern Ireland and 23 from Ireland, which includes the Cochrane Ireland team, ESI Fellows, ESI trainers, Emergency Evidence Response Service members, and those we placed on reviews) worked on **20** Cochrane publications (6 protocols, 10 reviews, 4 review updates). The work encompasses reviews across the Cochrane review typology, including Rapid Reviews^{2,3,4}, Scoping Reviews⁵, Qualitative Evidence Synthesis², Methodology Reviews^{6,7}, Network Meta-analyses⁸ and living mapping and synthesis (e.g., COVID-NMA⁹).

Cochrane in Northern Ireland in 2021

We established links with Cochrane Eyes and Vision, Cochrane Methods, and Cochrane Developmental, Psychosocial and Learning Problems, all based in **Queen's University Belfast (QUB)** and funded by the HSCNI R&D Division. Cochrane Eyes and Vision, who recently moved to QUB, will host an ophthalmology medical student with the ESI/Cochrane Ireland Summer Scholarship in 2021. Dr Nuala Livingstone from **Cochrane**, based in Belfast, has recently registered as a Cochrane Ireland Trainer and, working closely with Prof Bronagh Blackwood, will help further build the evidence synthesis community in Northern Ireland.

Communications, reach and engagement

We developed strong co-branding between ESI and Cochrane Ireland, which is reinforced on all communication channels. This has resulted in a mutually-beneficial relationship that has **expanded the reach and recognition** of both initiatives. Cochrane Ireland capitalises on ESI's channels – for example, during COVID-19, new evidence was uploaded to the ESI website and shared on social media with >3 million impressions in 2018-2021 (vs. 400k from 2015-2017, Cochrane Ireland Twitter), and relevant Cochrane reviews were sent directly to key people of influence in healthcare and policy. We target dissemination to relevant national audiences such as policymakers, charity groups, professional bodies, the Health Information Quality Authority, Department of Health and the media. The newsletter, sent via MailChimp to **>1250** people (60% Ireland, 15% NI, 25% international), contains a 'Cochrane Corner' of the latest evidence. We also send relevant mailshots via Cochrane.org to authors in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Cochrane Ireland co-organised the HRB **Trust and Truth in Health Research** conference (24-25 Nov 2020). Speakers included Iain Chalmers, Declan Devane, Margaret McCartney, Deirdre MacLoughlin (public partner), David Moher, and more, with an audience of charities, journalists, funders, the public, researchers, clinicians and policymakers. The conference reached over **700** attendees and was opened by the Irish **Minister for Health** Stephen Donnelly.

IMPACT

Building capacity in knowledge translation and accessible evidence

We have produced **3** evidence summaries, written **5** blog posts, published **7** press releases, given **6** radio interviews, featured in **27** news items and recorded **2** Cochrane podcasts¹¹. To improve communication of evidence to stakeholders, we supported capacity building by giving reviewers the opportunity to work with health journalists, knowledge brokers, Cochrane Knowledge Translation, graphic designers and end-users. Dr Catherine Houghton¹⁰ said

“ESI has opened a whole world of expertise in which I have learned and developed my skills. Our rapid qualitative evidence synthesis (QES) dissemination included infographics, podcasts, webinars and evidence summaries which enhanced the accessibility of our findings. I was privileged to be awarded a 'Writing for Communication' mentorship which resulted in a publication in the Irish Times. Being a part of ESI has helped me to have confidence in undertaking and disseminating QES and being able to present findings to the public in a meaningful way.”

International collaborations, partnerships and networking

In 2019, we established Cochrane Ireland as an **Associate Centre of Cochrane UK**, with whom we have a close and productive working relationship. For example, we co-organised the annual **Cochrane Ireland and Cochrane UK joint symposium** (<370 attendees in 2021). Cochrane UK's Dr Chris Cates delivered advanced training to **77** trainees, supported capacity building in **two** ESI Trainers, and mentored **one** ESI Fellow resulting in a first-author Cochrane review¹¹. We have a co-branded **webinar** stream with Cochrane UK, increasing the reach of our webinars by **15%**¹¹. Content from these webinars is being used in Cochrane UK RA3 workshop training and in the upcoming fifth Cochrane [Evidence Essentials](#) online learning module.

We engage with Cochrane at all levels, including the Editor-in-Chief (Karla Soares-Weiser, who now joins ESI's IAB), Cochrane Training, Cochrane Crowd, and the Central Editorial Teams. For example, in March 2020, Dr Soares-Weiser established a working group to offer advice and support to the Central Editorial Unit response to COVID-19. **Cochrane Ireland** was one of ten Cochrane group representatives on this group. Prof Devane represents Cochrane Ireland on the newly established **Advisory Group** of a major project to improve editorial integrity and efficiency across Cochrane, also chaired by the Editor-in-Chief.

Cochrane Ireland Fellowships – national and international reach

Our primary aim is to build a critical mass of experts in evidence synthesis to support health and social care requirements. As a baseline, there were 17 applications for the former **Cochrane Ireland Fellowship** scheme in 2015, from which **seven** awards were made¹². We average **70** applications with **16** awards annually suggesting increased awareness and interest in this scheme. We have placed **23** (out of **43**) Fellows on **Cochrane** reviews. We achieved this by establishing **new collaborations** with **9** Cochrane review groups and **5** geographical centres¹³, including Cochrane EPOC (Oxford, Ottawa), Cochrane Airways (UK, Australia), Cochrane Ear Nose and Throat and Cochrane Anaesthesia (Denmark and Japan). One of our most recent high-profile Fellowship appointments, Dr Deirdre Mulholland, **national Clinical Lead for Health Protection, Knowledge, Evidence and Quality Improvement**, will work on a **Cochrane Public Health** review. Outside of the Fellowship scheme, we placed Tony Canavan, CEO of Saolta (Hospital Group, West of Ireland), on a **Cochrane EPOC** review of **audit and feedback**.

Impact on policy and practice

As described in the COVID response case study, our **Cochrane** reviews have **informed** the **WHO's COVID-19 Clinical Management interim guidance** for clinicians caring for COVID-19 patients, and **WHO Interim Guidance** on the prevention, identification and management of health worker infection during COVID-19. In addition, our Cochrane Public Health review 'Video calls for reducing social isolation and loneliness in older people: a rapid review'¹¹ was cited in **WHO guidance on infection prevention and control for long-term care facilities** for COVID-19¹¹.

The pandemic further highlighted the need for evidence to be synthesised rapidly and updated frequently. This has accelerated the need for living reviews. In March 2020, **COVID-NMA**⁹ was

launched by an international multidisciplinary consortium (led by Cochrane France) to address evidence synthesis challenges and to support decision-making during the pandemic. **COVID-NMA** provides a living mapping of all trials and a comprehensive living synthesis of evidence for the prevention or treatment of COVID-19. Cochrane Ireland participates in the Steering Group and screening for COVID-NMA. This includes a daily review of all trial evidence, providing policymakers with the most up-to-date evidence available. From 28 April 2020, the **WHO** began using COVID-NMA as their primary source of evidence on the prevention and treatment of COVID-19¹⁴. This will inform decisions around treatments and vaccine effectiveness, globally. The first pair-wise review from COVID-NMA, 'Interleukin-6 blocking agents for treating COVID-19: a living systematic review'¹⁵, was published in the Cochrane Library on 18 March 2021 (Devane D, co-author).

Maintaining living reviews and building capacity in healthcare professionals

One of the significant challenges with living reviews is how they are sustained in terms of coordination and ongoing updating of the reviews. We are piloting a model involving a dedicated team of **five Irish endocrinologists** who will work together to maintain a large (>500 trials) **Cochrane EPOC** living systematic review in **diabetes** led by Prof Jeremy Grimshaw. Current Evidence Synthesis Ireland Fellow Paul MacDaragh Ryan is training these incoming Fellows. Former Fellow Aoife Egan is also joining this living synthesis, along with Consultant Endocrinologist, Prof Fidelma Dunne. Dr Egan and Prof Dunne will **contribute** directly to the review and **build capacity** in junior endocrinologists who will perform weekly updates and reap the benefits of being an ESI Fellow.

Cochrane Ireland Training

To date, we have delivered **13 Cochrane-specific** training events such as Writing a Cochrane systematic review (2-day course); Review completion workshop (1-day) and Cochrane Advanced Author Training workshop (1-day). In total, ESI events have trained **>2400** people in **36+** days in **>2** years. Previous Cochrane workshops had trained 2000 people from 2002-2016.

In 2020, we supported training by procuring Cochrane Interactive Learning licences for **12** Fellows and **50** workshop attendees. We also hosted free online training on searching for high-quality evidence on the **Cochrane Library**, attracting **456** attendees with **66%** from **outside academia**. Attendees worked at Beaumont Hospital, Children's Health Ireland, Health

Service Executive, National Forensic Mental Health Service, Institute of Public Health, National Rehabilitation Hospital, Tusla, Centre for Effective Services and more. We encourage our community to build their skills with **Cochrane Crowd**, a citizen science platform designed to help identify health evidence. ESI Fellow Ciara Gleeson said that Cochrane Ireland “encouraged me to take part in Cochrane Crowd challenges with >1000 classifications on Cochrane Crowd CINAHL task and >600 classifications on the RCT Identification task to date”. With collaborator Anna Noel Storr of Cochrane Crowd, we are co-developing modules to cater to the public and beginners to learn about evidence, study design and systematic reviews, with **7** modules drafted and ready for user feedback.

“Each aspect of writing a Cochrane review was explained efficiently and thoroughly. The information was extremely helpful - especially the practical examples because it brought it all from “paper to RevMan” and that is important in order to become familiar and confident using it. Everything was easy to understand and allowed for questions and discussions throughout. I learned a huge amount and now have a good understanding of concepts which I had previously struggled with. I thoroughly enjoyed the two days”.

Feedback from the **Cochrane Systematic Review** course (2019).

REFERENCES

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- 5 Smith et al. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD013819.
- 6 Gillies et al. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.MR000032
- 7 Houghton et al. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.MR000045
- 8 Ghosn et al. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD013881.
- 9 COVID-NMA, A living mapping and living systematic review of Covid-19 trials <https://covid-nma.com>
- 10 ESI feedback survey, Dr Catherine Houghton (22 February 2021)
- 11 ESI outputs and outcomes appendix
- 12 Cochrane UK Annual report 2015/2016
- 13 ESI Fellows Host Centres <https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/1/viewer?ll=7.939585515217101%2C-105.12635175000003&z=3&mit=n&mid=125-xIDcYRs2u9JFgXmL7vULMKH6COIRJ>
- 14 WHO R&D Blueprint COVID 19 Experimental Treatments - COVID Classification of treatment types
- 15 Ghosn et al <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD013881>



Photo 2. ESI Core Team at Cochrane in London with Karla Soares-Weiser, Editor in Chief of Cochrane (Jan 2020).

See also:

Burke N, Devane D, Galvin S, Keenan C (2020) COVID-19 Emergency Evidence Response Service: report from Ireland. In: Collaborating in response to COVID-19: editorial and methods initiatives across Cochrane <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD202002>

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