

FIGURE 13

How Are Cancer Screening Guidelines Developed?



Review Topic Nominations

Anyone can nominate a new topic for review at any time. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) reviews, selects, and prioritizes nominated topics based on relevance to and impact on disease prevention, primary care, and public health.



Develop Draft Research Plan

USPSTF and Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) develop a research plan and seek expert input on the prioritized topic. USPSTF posts the draft research plan to website for public comments.



Review Public Comments and Finalize Research Plan

USPSTF and EPC carefully review public comments and revise research plan as needed. USPSTF posts the final research plan to website.



Review Evidence and Develop Draft Recommendation

USPSTF assesses EPC-gathered evidence, weighing effectiveness and benefits/harms and develops a draft recommendation statement, which is posted to the website, along with EPC evidence review, for public comments.



Review Public Comments & Finalize Recommendation

Both the draft recommendation and evidence review are revised and finalized based on public comments and published in peer-reviewed journals and on the USPSTF website.

Panels of subject matter experts convened by professional organizations and government agencies, such as the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) assembled by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, meticulously review the available evidence and carefully weigh benefits of cancer screening against any potential harms before recommending at what age a person should be screened, for which cancer type, how frequently, and by which method. Summarized here as an example is the recommendation process followed by USPSTF.

During the development of cancer screening guidelines, USPSTF is supported by researchers from the Evidence-based Practice Center (EPC) program, a U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality initiative. Institutions in the United States and Canada are awarded 5-year contracts to serve as EPCs. Once USPSTF decides that a screening guideline merits consideration (cancers for which there are currently no screening guidelines) or revision (for existing guidelines) as new scientific evidence becomes available, the researchers from the EPC produce a draft evidence review. The draft evidence

review is based on evaluation of all the relevant scientific literature on the potential benefits and harms of screening, optimal method for screening, and the optimal age for screening initiation. USPSTF uses the draft evidence review to develop a draft recommendation statement. Both documents are made publicly available on USPSTF website for various stakeholders to provide their feedback. The EPC researchers and USPSTF review the feedback on the draft evidence review and the draft recommendation statement, respectively, and revise the documents if necessary. The final recommendation statement, outlining the new and/or revised guidelines, and the final evidence summary, outlining the reviewed evidence, are posted on the USPSTF website and are published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

There are minor differences in the processes that are used by different organizations to develop screening guidelines, but the overall rigor that is put in place to ensure maximal benefit and minimal harms to public health and safety is the same.