Strategic Advisory Committee Terms of Reference

Population Health Modelling Consensus Reporting Network for noncommunicable diseases (POPCORN)

2025-06-19

Version 0.9.3

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# Summary

This document describes how the Strategic Advisory Committee will support the development of a new reporting guideline for non-communicable disease simulation modelling (NCD modelling), the POPCORN guideline. The accompanying Project Overview and Study Protocol documents provide detailed scope definitions and guideline development methods.

## Purpose and scope

The Strategic Advisory Committee will advise the project’s investigators and working groups on developing a rigorous and impactful NCD modelling reporting guidelinefollowing established [EQUATOR Network methods.](https://www.equator-network.org/)[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Project output

The main output of the POPCORN study is a reporting guideline and the accompanying reporting checklist. The POPCORN guideline aims to improve transparency, reproducibility, and quality in NCD modelling studies by standardizing reporting practices. Doing so aims to support research integrity, facilitate evidence-informed policymaking, and promote greater trust in model-based findings.(1–4)

## Roles and responsibilities

Strategic Advisory Committee members advise on the guideline's **scope** (e.g., intended users and modelling contexts) and development **process** (such as stakeholder engagement and consensus methods), ensuring the guideline is relevant, rigorous, and usable.

Members will bring expertise in population health modelling research, scholarly publishing, public policy related to health systems and decision-making, reporting guideline methods, and insights from public perspectives. They will help engage their networks with the POPCORN study, including:

* Facilitating participation in this multi-country, multidisciplinary consensus initiative by recommending participants across all study components.
* Advising on publication strategies for POPCORN.
* Fostering awareness of the reporting guidelines among knowledge users.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The chair synthesizes areas of consensus and identifies unresolved issues in advice to the working group.

The principal investigators are responsible for integrating the Strategic Advisory Committee's input into the design and implementation of the reporting guideline within the broader project governance structure detailed in the Project Overview.

# 1. Background

The POPCORN project aims to develop a new reporting guideline for studies that use computational models to estimate the future impact of public health interventions on non-communicable disease (NCD) outcomes. These studies are increasingly used in policy evaluation and planning, but lack a common reporting standard.

The Terms of Reference outline the roles and responsibilities of the Strategic Advisory Committee (SAC). The SAC includes members with diverse expertise, and not all may be familiar with the development or purpose of reporting guidelines. The *Project Overview*, which accompanies this document, provide further details on scope, definitions, and methods.

Studies that estimate the impact of NCD interventions vary widely in methods and terminology but commonly involve complex data integration, multiple assumptions, and projections. Their findings can be influential, yet inconsistent reporting makes interpreting, assessing, and comparing results difficult. (5,6) Transparent reporting is critical for improving trust and reproducibility, and for using models in health policy.

While reporting guidelines exist for related fields, such as STROBE (observational studies), CHEERS (economic evaluations), and GATHER (burden of disease studies), there is currently no guideline for these forward-looking modelling studies. This gap has been repeatedly identified by stakeholders, including in a pre-pandemic international survey, where 98% of respondents (N=61) supported the development of such a guideline.(7)

Support was further confirmed through polling at international presentations. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced this need, highlighting the importance of transparency in model-informed decision-making.(1,7)

## 1.1. Study approach and deliverables

The guideline will be developed following best practices outlined by the EQUATOR Network (see attached) for reporting guideline development. The approach includes:

* **Defining the scope and target users** of the guideline.
* **Reviewing the evidence**, including two scoping reviews to identify candidate reporting items and current reporting practices.
* **Reaching consensus** through a Delphi process and a final consensus meeting with international experts.
* **Preparing and publishing** the reporting guideline, checklist, and explanation-and-elaboration document.
* **Promoting adoption and use**, supported by tools such as a reporting checklist, glossary, and web-based self-assessment platform.
* **Planning for sustainability**, including a process to update the guidelines as practices evolve.

Key deliverables include the reporting guideline and checklist, peer-reviewed publications, an implementation toolkit, and a web-based platform to support ongoing use and maintenance.

# 2. Roles and responsibilities

The Strategic Advisory Committee provides strategic, non-binding advice to support the development of the POPCORN reporting guideline. Members contribute expertise on scope, content, and methods, and help ensure the guideline is rigorous, relevant, and internationally applicable. Their input informs key decisions, though final responsibility for project design and execution rests with the principal investigators. The SAC focuses on high-level guidance and does not engage in operational tasks such as resource allocation or technical analyses.

## 2.1. Chair

The Chair will:

1. Lead the Strategic Advisory Committee according to the Terms of Reference.
2. Nominate and select Strategic Advisory Committee members in collaboration with the study's principal investigators.
3. Where consensus cannot be reached, summarise areas of agreement and clearly identify unresolved issues for referral to the study's principal investigators.
4. If resigning or needing a prolonged absence from the project, help appoint an interim or acting chair.

## 2.2. Strategic Advisory Committee roles and contributions

All members of the Strategic Advisory Committee, including the Chair, will:

1. **Provide strategic advice** to ensure the study’s scope, approach, and consensus activities align with its purpose and guiding principles.
2. **Review and provide feedback** on foundational materials, including the scoping reviews and draft checklist items, with attention to:

* Item completeness, clarity, and coherence.
* Alignment with the project’s scope and objectives.
* Relevance across various modelling approaches, settings, and stakeholder needs—including diverse global, disciplinary, and policy contexts.

1. **Advise on recruiting** study participants to ensure broad, diverse representation across regions, disciplines, and sectors.
2. **Identify and share relevant initiatives** that may inform or strengthen the guideline’s development.
3. **Support engagement and knowledge exchange** by:

* Promoting collaboration and sharing information through professional networks.
* Advising on dissemination and implementation strategies.
* Encouraging uptake of the guideline in academic, policy, and practice communities.

1. **Optionally contribute to subgroups or consensus activities** aligned with their expertise and interests.
2. **Support continuity in membership** by helping to identify suitable replacements if needed.
3. **Uphold project principles** by helping ensure the project remains transparent, inclusive, and aligned with open science values.

## 2.3. Domain-specific responsibilities

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Domain of Expertise | Responsibility |
| Modelling researcher | * Advise on model design, development and reporting. * Identify strategies to best implement POPCORN in practice. |
| Journal editor | * Advise on current practices and what would be accepted for integrating a new reporting guideline within the publication process. * Assist with dissemination of POPCORN. |
| Reporting guideline methodologist | * Provide expertise on guideline development methodology. * Advise on alignment with other EQUATOR guidelines. |
| Knowledge user | * Provide perspective on guideline usability and relevance. * Advise on implementation strategies for diverse contexts. |

# 3. Membership structure

## 3.1. Composition

The Strategic Advisory Committee will comprise leading international modelling researchers, journal editors, reporting guideline methodologists, and knowledge users. **Modelling researchers** will be from for-profit and academic institutes worldwide. **Knowledge users** are individuals who influence or are impacted by the development, use, or reporting of NCD simulation models—including policy actors, health professionals, public representatives, and others who apply or act on model-based findings in diverse contexts. Strategic Advisory Committee members will come from all major world regions (World Bank definition), including representatives from low- and middle-income countries.

### 3.1.1. Chair

One individual will be identified to chair the Strategic Advisory Committee. The Chair will be selected based on their expertise in NCD modelling or guideline development and ability to facilitate collaborative processes.

The commitment term for the Chair is anticipated to last from February 2025 to September 2028.

### 3.1.2. Strategic Advisory Committee

The Strategic Advisory Committee will consist of approximately 10 members. The Principal Investigators and the Chair will identify and invite members based on their expertise, geographic representation, and key knowledge users’ perspectives. A complete list of members will be maintained on the study website.

The commitment term for Strategic Advisory Committee members is anticipated to last from October 2025 to September 2027.

### 3.1.3. Ex Officio

The Strategic Advisory Committee will include Ex Officio members, appointed prior to the Committee's formation. While serving in an advisory capacity, these members will also participate in consensus activities. Their role is directly attributed to their expertise in guideline development. The commitment term for the Ex Officio members is anticipated to last from July 2025 to September 2028.

## 3.2. Compensation

Community or public representatives will be offered compensation for their time and expertise contributing to the study. The compensation rate will be comparable to pay rates for other professionals in similar roles, while considering the level of time, effort, expertise, and experiential knowledge brought to the project. Other Strategic Advisory Committee members will participate voluntarily as part of their professional activities.

# 4. Meetings

## 4.1. Commitment

Four meetings are planned for the Strategic Advisory Committee, with specific tasks at each meeting:

1. A ‘kick-off’ meeting for the Strategic Advisory Committee to meet each other.
   * This meeting will review the draft Strategic Advisory Committee terms of reference and the study protocol.
2. Preparation meeting for the Delphi exercise.
   * This meeting will review the guidelines in preparation for the Delphi exercise.
   * The study working group performed a literature review and summarized the findings. The Strategic Advisory Committee will provide feedback as described in the roles and responsibilities.
   * The Strategic Advisory Committee will review and provide feedback on pre-ultimate documents.
3. Consensus meeting to develop the reporting guideline.
   * This hybrid (in-person and online) meeting will review the Delphi exercise, which forms the basis of the reporting guideline. The meeting has a separate consensus approach for developing the reporting guideline.
   * Review the reporting guideline and prepare for dissemination.
4. During the final meeting, the Strategic Advisory Committee will review and provide feedback on the draft reporting guideline.
   * The Strategic Advisory Committee will also guide the dissemination plan.

As the project progresses, there will be opportunities for further participation in its continued development (i.e. developing a subgroup to oversee the living review and updates to the guidelines). Participation in further initiatives will be voluntary and will be identified to the Strategic Advisory Committee as they arise.

### 4.1.1. Ad hoc support

The Strategic Advisory Committee has extensive knowledge and experience. Outside regular meetings, the study Working Group may call upon individuals for support and advice in their expertise area.

## 4.2. Conflict of interest

Any conflicts of interest among Strategic Advisory Committee members will be assessed before the beginning of the study. Strategic Advisory Committee members will be expected to complete a conflict-of-interest disclosure form and will be expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest before discussing relevant items. Members must declare any new conflicts of interest that arise during the course of their commitment to the SAC.

## 4.3. Confidentiality

The study follows an open science and collaborative approach. Materials shared with the Strategic Advisory Committee can be broadly shared unless marked as confidential. Members agree not to share any materials or discussions labelled as confidential.

## 4.4. Quorum

Working groups will decide on an appropriate quorum based on the number of members required for selected working groups; with suggested guidance that at least 50% of members be present. From there, quorum must be met at all meetings to facilitate decision-making and editing of the framework. A similar quorum requirement may be established for the Strategic Advisory Committee, acknowledging that it functions in an advisory capacity without decision-making authority.

## 4.5. Secretariat

Support for the Strategic Advisory Committee will be provided by Study Team members at the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute.

## 4.6. Reporting

Meeting summaries and relevant information of the project’s progress will be provided on the study website ([popcorn-statement.org](https://popcorn-statement.org/)) and/or [OSF.io](https://osf.io/vsaju/). At a minimum, updates will occur after every meeting with the Strategic Advisory Committee, with project-specific updates reported ad hoc.

This process will also help to facilitate knowledge transfer, should a Strategic Advisory Committee member need to abandon their role during the 5-year period, and a new member need to be onboarded.

# 5. Governance framework and guiding principles

## 5.1. Governance philosophy and approach

The POPCORN governance framework ensures transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in developing the reporting guideline. It provides a collaborative structure that embodies core values and supports high-quality guideline development through:

* **Evidence-informed approaches**: The guideline's development will be informed by best practices, stakeholder input, and systematic review findings, enhancing its global relevance and practical utility.
* **Clarity of roles and processes:** Establishing clear lines of responsibility among the chair, Strategic Advisory Committee members, working groups, and principal investigators to prevent confusion and enhance coordination.
* **Ethical practices**: Fostering trust through conflict-of-interest disclosure, confidentiality guidelines, and adherence to the Chatham House Rule to create an environment where participants can engage openly while maintaining appropriate boundaries.

## 5.2. Open science

Open science means that people worldwide can contribute to and benefit from science. The POPCORN project will:

* Seek input from diverse disciplines and populations who develop and use NCD models and those who will benefit from a reporting guideline.
* Ensure the reporting guideline is accessible to a wide audience.
* Maintain transparency and reproducibility in all research activities.
* Follow FAIR principles.
* Maintain a public study website with Strategic Advisory Committee member profiles and conflict-of-interest statements.

### 5.2.1. Availability of study materials

The Strategic Advisory Committee terms of reference and study protocol will be made publicly available on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/vsaju/) and may be included as supplementary material in any published activities. Pre-ultimate documents may also be made publicly available to improve reproducibility.

## 5.3. Consensus-based decision making

The POPCORN project integrates open science principles and where possible consensus-based processes to reflect diverse perspectives. This approach:

* Promotes equitable representation and respectful engagement.
* Includes voices from low- and middle-income countries and knowledge users.
* Provides a framework where the principal investigators retain final decision-making when consensus cannot be reached, while the Strategic Advisory Committee and Chair guide, advise, and synthesize views.

If consensus cannot be reached, the Strategic Advisory Committee Chair will be responsible for summarizing areas of agreement and identifying unresolved issues. When unable to reach a consensus, decisions favouring open science principles will be prioritized.

## 5.4. Collaboration

The POPCORN project fosters collaboration by sharing expertise and resources, striving for consensus-based decision-making, and acknowledging each contributor's unique value.

### 5.4.1. Multinational and multidisciplinary participation

The project will engage and support diverse perspectives by including multidisciplinary experts in developing the reporting guideline and receiving feedback from all groups during the Delphi process.

### 5.4.2. Culture of trust and respect

All team members can share their thoughts, opinions, and views as appropriate. Every member must commit to creating a safe and respectful space for sharing without judgment or ridicule. Discourse surrounding disagreements should focus solely on the opposing view or opinion and never target individuals. Team members who feel unsafe or uncomfortable should bring this to the attention of the study working group, who will document and investigate as required.

### 5.4.3. Inclusive and open dialogue

The Chatham House Rule will apply to all Strategic Advisory Committee meetings and discussions within working groups to encourage the free expression of ideas without attributing them to specific individuals or institutions: "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed."

### 5.5. Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI)

Achieving a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive study is essential to creating an impactful reporting guideline necessary to advance knowledge and understanding and to respond to local, national, and global challenges. The POPCORN project is committed to:

1. Incorporating EDI principles by ensuring diverse participation from Delphi panelists and strategic advisory and working group members.
2. Reviewing the guideline using an EDI perspective.
3. Ensuring the final criteria list reflects input from all NCD modelling groups.
4. Placing focus on equity and how surveillance is conducted in different regions.

# 6. Acknowledgements

## 6.1. Funding source

All papers and presentations must acknowledge the project funders using the following statement: “This work was supported by CIHR [Funding Reference Number: PJT-195829].”

## 6.2. Collaborators

It is important that individual contributions are recognized, and that credit is shared appropriately. All strategic advisory and working group members will receive acknowledgement for their contributions verbally and/or in writing, depending on the context. Acknowledgement goes beyond authorship for publications and includes websites, presentations, podcasts, and correspondences, among other knowledge translation activities.

## 6.3. Authorship

We encourage collaboration and co-authorship with Strategic Advisory Committee members while ensuring that contributors who have made substantive intellectual contributions to a paper are given credit as authors and that contributors credited as authors understand their role in taking responsibility and being accountable for what is published. Authorship will be based on the following four criteria:

1. Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data for the work; AND
2. Drafting the work or revising it critically for important intellectual content; AND
3. Final approval of the version to be published; AND
4. Agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

In cases where journals limit the number of authors, additional authors may be recognized as a group under a single heading such as “the POPCORN Strategic Advisory Committee.” Those who do not meet all four criteria will not be listed as authors but may be acknowledged individually or together as a group under a single heading (e.g., “on behalf of the POPCORN Strategic Advisory Committee”), with written permission from all acknowledged individuals. All publications related to the development of the reporting guideline will list the Strategic Advisory Committee and associated working groups as authors. Delphi participants will be acknowledged if they wish to be named.

Authorship contributions will be acknowledged using the [Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT)](https://credit.niso.org/) system. The CRediT system is a high-level taxonomy, including 14 roles, that can be used to describe the roles typically played by contributors to research outputs. Each role describes a contributor’s specific contribution to the scholarly output. A CRediT authorship contribution statement will be provided for manuscript submissions.

## 6.4 Intellectual property and licensing

The ownership of intellectual property will follow the requirements of the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute and other collaborating institutions. All articles will be published as open access, and all products will have an open license (CC-BY-SA-4.0 license).

# 7. Documentation review

The Terms of Reference document will be finalized by the Strategic Advisory Committee and updated as needed.

## 7.1 Evaluation

To ensure the Terms of Reference remain relevant and effective throughout the project, a review and evaluation will be conducted halfway through the project timeline. This review will assess the effectiveness of the terms, identify any gaps or areas needing adjustment, and ensure alignment with the evolving needs of the project. Any necessary updates or revisions will be made to reflect changes in scope, objectives, or project priorities. The Strategic Advisory Committee will be involved in the review process and will approve any proposed changes to the Terms of Reference.

# 9. References

1. Hsu CC, Sandford BA. The Delphi Technique: Making Sense of Consensus. [cited 2025 Jan 23]; Available from: https://openpublishing.library.umass.edu/pare/article/id/1418/

2. Saltelli A, Bammer G, Bruno I, Charters E, Di Fiore M, Didier E, et al. Five ways to ensure that models serve society: a manifesto. Nature. 2020 Jun 25;582(7813):482–4.

3. Equator Nework. Enhancing the Quality and Transparency of Health Research. [cited 2024 Mar 5]. EQUATOR Network | Enhancing the QUAlity and Transparency Of Health Research. Available from: https://www.equator-network.org/

4. Moher D, Schulz KF, Simera I, Altman DG. Guidance for developers of health research reporting guidelines. PLoS Med. 2010 Feb 16;7(2):e1000217.

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6. Manuel DG, Perez R, Sanmartin C, Taljaard M, Hennessy D, Wilson K, et al. Measuring burden of unhealthy behaviours using a multivariable predictive approach: life expectancy lost in Canada attributable to smoking, alcohol, physical inactivity, and diet. PLoS Med. 2016 Aug;13(8):e1002082.

7. Mytton O, Briggs A. Report on consultation of scope of proposed reporting guidelines for public health NCD modelling studies [Internet]. 2019 Feb [cited 2024 Feb 28]. Available from: https://osf.io/s4gak/

# 10. Version changes

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Version | Description | Date |
| 0.9.0 | Initial version | 2025-03-08 |
| 0.9.1 | Address feedback by Chair and co-PI   * + Clearer delineation of responsibilities between EG and project team.   + Change to knowledge user. Recognition that internationally there is a wide range of terms for partners, community members, and stakeholders. | 2025-04-24 |
| 0.9.2 | Address feedback by Chair and co-PI   * + Reference overview and protocol that has details about the project.   + Introduce working groups earlier.   + References to the contribution of reporting guidelines to improving reporting, transparency, use research in policy.   + More general discussion about the roles of the EG (remove reference to Delphi, instead referencing participants throughout the study).   + Combine section 2 and 3. | 2025-06-02 |
| 0.9.3 | Address feedback by Chair and co-PI   * Change group name to be more reflective of advisory role (Strategic Advisory Committee) * Clarification of SAC members having one role * Addition of Ex Officio category | 2025-06-19 |

1. The [EQUATOR Network](https://www.equator-network.org/) provides evidence-based guidance for developing health research reporting guidelines through systematic literature reviews, expert consensus processes, and stakeholder engagement. This established methodology ensures reporting guidelines are rigorous, internationally applicable, and effectively address identified gaps in research transparency. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The term “knowledge user” is used in this document to describe individuals or groups who are engaged in, influence, or are impacted by NCD modelling and the use of related reporting guidelines. This includes, but is not limited to, policymakers, public health professionals, community representatives, and other users of model-informed evidence. The term is intended to encompass what some contexts refer to as stakeholders, partners, or end users. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)