

# Undisclosed financial conflicts of interest in Canadian clinical guidelines on medications

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Failure to disclose organizational financial conflicts of interest by producers of Canadian clinical practice guidelines on medications is widespread, pointing to the need for reform, a new research paper highlights in *CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal)*.

Most Canadian guideline producers who make recommendations on medications routinely receive industry funding, including from companies that produce drugs evaluated in the guidelines.

"We didn't find any examples where guideline-producing organizations disclosed their organization's industry funding in a guideline," said Katharine Elder, a researcher at the Lady Davis Institute at the Jewish General Hospital, Montréal, Quebec, the study's lead author.

"Reform is urgently needed to ensure that guidelines used in Canadian health care are free of commercial influences that may not reflect the best interests of patients," says Dr. Brett Thombs, professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Lady Davis Institute at the Jewish General Hospital and McGill University. "Ideally, reform would come from guideline-producing organizations themselves, either out of a desire to better serve the public and society or through pressure from members."

International directives for guideline producers recommend that they should avoid including committee members with financial conflicts of interest, not allow members with conflicts to influence recommendations, and not permit chairs and cochairs to have conflicts

of interest. Most of the guidelines reviewed, however, included members with financial conflicts of interest, and all that reported on chairs or cochairs had one of these people with a financial [conflict](#) of interest.

"Our results suggest that these recommendations have largely been ignored by many Canadian disease or condition interest groups and medical professional societies that produce clinical practice guidelines," added Dr. Thombs.

The study investigated the creation of Canadian clinical practice guidelines that included drug recommendations. They included 21 [clinical practice guidelines](#), with 3 from government-supported organizations, 9 from disease or condition groups and 9 from medical professional societies. None of 3 government-sponsored guideline producers received industry funding, and none of their members disclosed financial conflicts of interest. Among the 18 disease or condition [interest](#) groups and medical professional societies, more than 90% reported on their websites receiving [industry funding](#) from producers of drugs being recommended. However, none disclosed this [funding](#) in a guideline.

**More information:** *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (2020). [www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.191737](http://www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.191737)

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