According to the MECIR conduct standards, item 41, it is now mandatory for authors to provide a PRISMA study flow diagram in their reviews. CCDAN has two registers in house one of which is studies based. For this reason we have slightly amended criteria for these diagrams and have thus put together this guide and template to assist authors. It is essential that you use a reference management software in the study selection process, which will help you record information for the below purposes. Please note that for new reviews you should combine all previous searches so that this reflects the culmination of the searching process. For updates where this may not be possible (due to lack of information on previous searches), you can do a diagram for the searches undertaken for the update in question. Further guidance is available on our website along with contact details for the editorial base team.

SEARCH PROCESS 1: CCDAN registers
These are the main searches for your review corresponding to the methods section: "Electronic searches". They should be split into two groups, (a) studies register and (b) references register. Full details of CCDAN registers are available here.

SEARCH PROCESS 2: Other databases
This section also corresponds to the methods section "electronic searches", but these are complementary searches of specialist databases that are not covered by CCDAN’s registers. More info.

SEARCH PROCESS 3: Additional resources
This box corresponds with the methods section "Searching other resources". You must search grey literature, international trial registers and reference lists, and contact individuals and organisations about any unpublished or ongoing studies. More info.

The relevant MECIR standards are points 25-31. The CCDAN website has full guidance on the steps involved in the search identification process. If you have any doubts contact tsc@ccdan.org.

Remember all steps from here onwards should be done independently in duplicate.

It is recommended that you use a predefined screening sheet for this phase. Amongst other things this will help determine the primary reason for exclusion. See Handbook Ch. 7.2.4.

SEARCH PROCESS 2:

RECORDS EXCLUDED: You must record the reasons for exclusion (we recommend grouping these according to PICO criteria). Only give one reason for exclusion for each reference.

MERIC, item 40, states that relevant studies must be included irrespective of whether data are reported in a ‘useable’ way; although they can’t be included in the MA, such studies can still be considered in the discussion. It is essential to bear this in mind when selecting studies.

MERIC, item 42, states that you should collate multiple reports of the same study, so that each study rather than each report is the unit of interest in the review. CCDAN website provides practical guidance on this.

INCLUDED STUDIES: no. of studies included in qualitative analysis
This is the total number of studies included irrespective of whether they provide data.

INCLUDED STUDIES: no. of studies included in meta-analysis
This is the number of studies that provided useable data and so were included in meta-analysis

The authors should inform CCDAN of any additional RCTs they found through searching additional databases or contacting trialists so these can be added to our databases.

This row should show how many included studies contributed to each comparison. If you have a large number of comparisons then contact the editorial base for advice on how best to present this.

SEARCH PROCESS 1: CCDAN registers
a) CCDANCTR-Studies = 67 studies (90 refs)
b) CCDANCTR-References = 100 refs
(Unique records)

SEARCH PROCESS 2: Other databases
Database X = 40 refs
Database Y = 25 refs
Database Z = 5 refs
Total = 70 refs

SEARCH PROCESS 3: Additional resources
Personal communication = 1 ref
International trial register X = 2 refs
(Unique records)
Total = 3 refs

SCREENING: no. of records screened after de-duplication
1a = 67 studies (69 refs)
1b = 20 refs
2 = 10 refs
3 = 3 refs

Includes excluded:
1a = 15 (study type); 18 (population); 7 (intervention); 2 (comparison)
1b = 9 (study type); 1 (intervention)
2 = 4 (study type); 2 (population); 2 (comparison)
3 = 0

ELIGIBILITY: no. of full-text articles assessed
1a = 25 studies (35 refs)
1b = 10 refs
2 = 2 refs
3 = 3 refs

Records excluded:
1a = 2 (population); 1 (comparison)
1b = 1 (intervention); 3 (population); 2 (intervention); 2 (comparison)
2 = 2 (intervention)
3 = 0
Ongoing studies:
Studies awaiting classification:

INCLUDED STUDIES: no. of studies included in qualitative analysis
1a = 22 studies (28 refs)
1b = 2 studies (2 refs)
2 = 0 studies (0 refs)
3 = 3 studies (3 refs)

INCLUDED STUDIES: no. of studies included in meta-analysis
1a = 20 studies (25 refs)
1b = 2 studies (2 refs)
2 = 0 studies (0 refs)
3 = 3 studies (3 refs)

Comparison 1: Drug X versus placebo
11 studies (540 participants)

Comparison 2: Drug X versus drug W
10 studies (354 participants)

Comparison 3: Drug X versus drug Y
2 studies (43 participants)

Comparison 4: Drug X versus drug Z
2 studies (23 participants)