EAU Guidelines Office Policy on the Declaration and Management of Conflict of Interests

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Statement to Guidelines Office members

1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to protect the independence, integrity, credibility, and trustworthiness of EAU clinical Guidelines and associated products.

The EAU recognises that individuals selected for Guidelines development are often leaders in their fields and may therefore have financial, professional, academic, institutional, or personal interests relevant to their work. The existence of an interest does not necessarily exclude an individual from participation.

The EAU's approach is to:

1. require complete and timely disclosure;
2. assess the relevance and risk of declared interests;
3. manage identified conflicts proportionately;
4. preserve access to necessary expertise while protecting independent decision-making;
5. document and publish relevant declarations and management decisions;
6. respond appropriately to incomplete or inaccurate disclosure.

The primary objective is effective management rather than the unrealistic expectation that all panel members will have no interests.

2. Scope

This policy applies to everyone who can influence EAU Guidelines development, updating, approval, publication, dissemination, or derivative products, including members of the:

- Guidelines Office Board;
- Guidelines Office Methods and Dissemination Committees;
- Guidelines Panels;
- Guidelines Associates;
- Patient representatives;
- External experts and advisers;
- Collaborating society representatives;
- EAU staff and consultants supporting Guidelines development;
- Any other individual invited to participate in deliberation, drafting, evidence assessment, or recommendation formulation.

3. Core definitions

3.1 Interest

An interest is any financial, professional, academic, institutional, personal, or other relationship or activity that is relevant, or could reasonably be perceived as relevant, to EAU Guidelines work.

An interest is not automatically a conflict.

3.2 Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest exists when an interest creates a risk that a person's judgement, decisions, or actions concerning the primary purpose of the EAU Guidelines Office may be unduly influenced, or may reasonably be perceived as being unduly influenced, by a secondary interest.

A conflict may be actual, potential, or perceived.

3.3 Relevance

An interest is relevant when it relates to:

- the condition, population, test, intervention, procedure, product, service, or comparator addressed;
- an organisation that could benefit or be disadvantaged by the Guidelines;
- a recommendation or evidence review under consideration;
- the person's role or authority within the Guidelines process.

3.4 Material change

A material change includes a new or ended relationship, a significant change in value or role, a new relevant publication or intellectual property interest, or any development that could change the previous risk assessment or management plan.

4. Interests that must be declared

Members must declare interests relating to themselves and, where relevant, their spouse, partner, dependent family member, or an organisation over which they exercise significant control.

4.1 Financial interests

These include:

- employment and executive or directorship roles;
- consultancy and advisory-board membership;
- personal honoraria and speaking fees;
- research funding, grants, contracts, or salary support;
- institutional funding where the individual controls, directs, or materially benefits from it;
- travel, accommodation, hospitality, equipment, or other benefits;
- ownership of shares, stock options, or other equity, excluding diversified independently managed funds;
- patents, licences, royalties, and other intellectual property rights;
- paid expert testimony;
- ownership or partnership in a commercial enterprise;
- anticipated or agreed future relationships.

4.2 Non-financial interests

These include:

- authorship or leadership of research central to the recommendation;
- development of a device, procedure, intervention, score, or technology;
- leadership positions in professional societies, advocacy organisations, charities, journals, or competing guideline bodies;
- membership of, or other active participation in, national or international guideline panels or guideline-development groups whose scope overlaps with EAU Guidelines work;
- strongly stated public positions directly relevant to the topic;
- institutional or professional interests;
- involvement in litigation or regulatory proceedings;
- close personal or professional relationships;
- other interests that could reasonably be perceived as affecting impartiality.

Routine clinical expertise, publication activity, and participation in another guideline group are not inherently conflicts. Participation in another guideline group must nevertheless be declared where its scope overlaps with EAU Guidelines work and will be assessed according to the person's role, the degree of topic overlap, timing, access to confidential material, and any risk of competing obligations or perceived lack of independence.

4.3 Organisational interests

Relevant institutional funding and relationships should be declared where the member:

- has authority over the funding;
- benefits professionally or financially;
- is responsible for the funded programme;
- can direct how the funds are used;
- holds a senior leadership position in the recipient organisation.

Funding received by the EAU or the Guidelines Office must not influence Guidelines topic selection, panel composition, development, recommendations, or updating. Appropriate separation must be maintained between decisions about organisational funding and decisions made within the Guidelines development process.

5. Disclosure period

Declarations must cover:

- the current calendar year;
- the preceding two calendar years;
- known or agreed future relationships expected within the next 12 months.

Longer-lasting interests, including patents, equity, litigation, and continuing intellectual property rights, must be declared for as long as they remain relevant.

6. Electronic declaration through MyEAU

6.1 Initial declaration

All candidates must complete the Guidelines Office declaration of interests in MyEAU before appointment or access to confidential Guidelines work. An appointment cannot be finalised until the declaration has been submitted and assessed.

6.2 Annual September update

Every September, the Guidelines Office will prompt all covered individuals to:

- review the complete declaration;
- amend any outdated information;
- add new interests;
- confirm that the submission is complete and accurate.

The annual declaration should include all interests that fall within the disclosure period.

Reminders will be issued at defined intervals. A member whose declaration remains incomplete after the deadline may not participate in meetings, voting, drafting, or other Guidelines activity until compliance is restored.

6.3 Updates during the year

Members must update MyEAU within 30 days of any new interest and/or material change to an existing interest.

In addition to updates to MyEAU during the year, where an interest is directly relevant to an imminent meeting or recommendation decision, or the individual reasonably expects a new interest will constitute a high conflict risk as defined in this policy, it must be reported in writing by email to the Guidelines Office staff and the Guidelines Chair immediately and before participation.

6.4 Meeting confirmation

At the start of each formal panel meeting, the Chair must ask whether:

- declarations on MyEAU are current;
- any new interests have arisen;
- any member has an interest relevant to an agenda item, including Guidelines text updates and recommendation decisions.

The answer and any management decision must be recorded in the minutes.

6.5 Verification of declarations

The Guidelines Office may, where proportionate, verify a declaration against information from appropriate external sources. Verification may be considered for Chair or Board appointments, cases assessed as potentially high risk, or where there is reason to question whether a declaration is complete or accurate. The individual will have an opportunity to clarify any apparent discrepancy before an assessment or management decision is finalised.

6.6 Public transparency

The Guidelines Office will maintain a record of declarations of interest and the relevant management decisions arising from them. The record should identify:

- the relevant interest and the member's Guidelines role;
- the assessed conflict-risk category where one has been assigned;
- the management measure or restriction applied, including topic-specific recusals or restrictions on drafting, discussion, chairing, or voting;
- the date or Guidelines cycle to which the declaration and management decision apply;
- any material change to the management arrangement during the Guidelines cycle.

Relevant disclosure information will be published when panel membership is announced or, for existing panels, as part of the Guidelines cycle disclosure record, and will be updated when a material change affects participation. Meeting records should also make visible any recusal or participation restriction that affected deliberation or voting.

7. Assessment of interests

No activity should automatically be treated as creating the same level of conflict in every situation. Assessment should consider:

1. specific relevance to the topic or recommendation;
2. nature of the interest;
3. financial magnitude, frequency, and personal benefit;
4. recency, duration, and whether it is continuing;
5. degree of control or authority exercised by the member;
6. role in the Guidelines process, particularly chairing, evidence interpretation, drafting, and voting;
7. proximity to a named product, intervention, or commercial entity;
8. potential effect of the recommendation on the member or associated organisation;
9. panel composition and concentration of similar interests;
10. public perception and the effect on trust;
11. whether the interest can be effectively managed.

Financial thresholds may inform assessment but should not alone determine the classification.

8. Risk categories

8.1 No relevant conflict

The interest has no meaningful relationship with the member's EAU Guidelines activity.

8.2 Low conflict risk

The interest is relevant but is unlikely to exert meaningful influence because it is minor, remote, historical, indirect, or unrelated to the EAU Guidelines decision-making process or role.

8.3 Moderate conflict risk

The interest is sufficiently relevant to require active management but does not prevent meaningful participation in EAU Guidelines activity.

8.4 High conflict risk

A high conflict risk exists where a relevant interest creates a substantial actual, potential, or perceived risk to the independence or credibility of a Guidelines decision.

Potential indicators of a high conflict risk include:

- current employment or executive responsibility within a directly affected commercial entity;
- significant equity or intellectual property;
- substantial personal income from a directly affected entity;
- responsibility for a product or intervention under evaluation;
- a current commercial role directly connected with the Guidelines recommendation;
- a combination of relevant relationships;
- a relevant conflict held by a Guidelines Chair or individual with substantial control over the process;
- concentration of similar interests that undermines panel balance;
- a relationship that cannot be managed through limited recusal.

A high-risk interest does not automatically require permanent exclusion. The Guidelines Office Board must determine whether it can be managed.

9. Decision-making authority

9.1 Routine assessment of no, low, or moderate conflict risks

Guidelines Office staff may undertake completeness checks and prepare preliminary assessments. Panel Chairs and Vice-chairs may recommend management of low- and moderate-risk interests, supported by Guidelines Office staff.

9.2 High-risk assessment

The Guidelines Office Board has final authority to determine:

- whether an interest constitutes a high conflict risk;
- whether the interest can be managed;
- the mandatory management plan;
- whether appointment or continued membership is appropriate;
- whether panel composition requires alteration;
- whether a prior decision or recommendation requires review.

The affected member must not participate in the Board's decision. For difficult, sensitive, or contested cases, the Board should obtain a documented advisory review from a small Conflict of Interest Review Group or from suitably qualified independent reviewers with expertise in ethics, methodology, governance, compliance, or the relevant clinical area. The advisory review informs, but does not replace, the Board's final responsibility for the decision.

Where the case concerns a Guidelines Office Board member, the Board Chair, or another circumstance in which the impartiality of the Board's own review could reasonably be questioned, the affected individual must take no part in the assessment and independent review is required. The Board must document the reviewers used, their own relevant interests, the advice received, and the reasons for the final decision.

The Conflict of Interest Review Group will be assembled as required from independent members of the Guidelines Office and Methods Committee.

9.3 Chair and Vice-chair interests

The interests of Chairs and Vice-chairs must be reviewed by the Guidelines Office Board.

A Chair must not have a current high-risk interest that is broadly relevant to the Guidelines, unless the Guidelines Office Board determines that exceptional circumstances justify appointment or continued service. Any exception must be explicitly reviewed, supported by a documented rationale, accompanied by a proportionate management plan, and subject to independent advisory review where required. A topic-specific interest may be manageable by transferring responsibility for that topic to an unconflicted Vice-chair or designated senior member of the Guidelines panel.

Where the Chair and Vice-chair share the same relevant conflict, the Board must appoint an unconflicted individual to lead that component of the work or reconsider the leadership composition.

10. Management measures

Management should be proportionate and tailored to the particular interest and decision. Available measures include:

- disclosure without restriction;
- enhanced documentation;
- independent checking of evidence;
- requirement to provide factual expertise only;
- prohibition from selecting or appraising evidence;
- prohibition from drafting recommendation wording;
- participation in discussion without voting;
- recusal from discussion and voting;
- absence from the relevant part of a meeting;
- temporary replacement of the Chair;
- external methodological or expert review;
- modification or ending of the relevant relationship;
- exclusion from a defined topic or workstream;
- temporary suspension;
- non-appointment or removal from the panel.

11. Panel balance

The Guidelines Office Staff and Board should assess interests at both individual and panel levels.

Panel balance does not mean balancing one commercial interest against another. It requires:

- a majority of individuals eligible to deliberate and vote who are without relevant moderate or high conflict risk for each major recommendation area;
- diversity of expertise and professional perspective;
- meaningful patient representation;
- appropriate methodological independence;
- avoidance of concentration of relationships with one company, product class, or intervention;
- sufficient unconflicted members to deliberate and vote.

For this purpose, a "major recommendation area" means a clinically or methodologically distinct area for which the panel develops one or more substantive recommendations.

In highly specialised areas where the necessary expertise is concentrated among individuals with relevant research or other non-financial interests, the majority principle may be varied only where the Guidelines Office Board records a clear justification and additional safeguards, such as independent evidence appraisal, methodological oversight, external review, or restricted voting, are applied.

12. Recommendation development and voting

Before deliberation on a Guidelines recommendation:

1. relevant interests must be identified;
2. the Chair must state any applicable management arrangements;
3. recusals must be recorded;
4. the number of eligible voters must be confirmed.

A member with a managed relevant conflict may provide factual or contextual information where permitted but must not:

- dominate panel discussion;
- make a final determination on inclusion or exclusion of evidence within the Guidelines, including within the summary of evidence wording;
- draft the final Guidelines recommendation wording;
- determine the final Guidelines recommendation strength;
- draft the final strength rating form supporting the Guidelines recommendation;
- vote where recusal has been required.

Recommendation records should identify the number eligible to vote, the outcome, abstentions, and recusals.

13. Non-disclosure and non-compliance

Deliberate concealment of an interest or repeated refusal to comply may result in removal from all Guidelines Office activities. This process is overseen by the Guidelines Office Board.

14. Appeals

An individual may appeal a high-risk determination, management restriction, non-appointment, suspension, or removal.

The appeal must:

- be submitted in writing to the Guidelines Office Board within 30 days;
- identify the decision challenged;
- provide the grounds and any new information.

An appeal must be reviewed by an Appeal Review Panel that is independent of the original decision. The Appeal Review Panel should comprise at least three persons, none of whom participated in the original decision. Members of the Appeal Review Panel will be selected, as needed, from independent members of the Guidelines Office, Guidelines Methods Committee, and the EAU Board. Members of the Appeal Review Panel must declare any relevant interests before undertaking the review.

Where the original decision was taken by the Guidelines Office Board, the Appeal Review Panel must conduct an independent review of the evidence, process, proportionality, and any new information and provide a reasoned written recommendation to the Guidelines Office Board. The Guidelines Office Board retains final governance responsibility but must exclude the affected individual and any member whose impartiality is reasonably in question; any departure from the Appeal Review Panel's recommendation must be explicitly justified and documented.

The final appeal outcome, the reasons for it, and the composition of the Appeal Review Panel must be documented and communicated in writing by email to the individual. The appeal outcome is final within the Guidelines Office process.

15. Responsibilities

15.1 Individual members

Members are responsible for complete, accurate, and timely disclosure, as well as compliance with management plans.

15.2 Panel Chairs

Chairs are responsible for meeting-level confirmation, applying approved management arrangements, and preventing inappropriate influence.

15.3 Guidelines Office staff

The Guidelines Office staff are responsible for:

- administering MyEAU declarations;
- issuing prompts and reminders;
- maintaining records;
- supporting publication of disclosure information;
- reporting potentially high-risk cases to the Guidelines Office Manager, who is responsible for the relevant reporting to the Guidelines Office Board.

15.4 Guidelines Office Board

The Guidelines Office Board is responsible for:

- policy ownership;
- high-risk determinations, including commissioning independent advisory review where required;
- approval of high-risk management plans;
- appointment of independent Appeal Review Panels and consideration of their recommendations;
- oversight of panel balance;
- sanctions for serious non-compliance;
- monitoring policy implementation;
- periodic policy review.

16. Concise policy statement for members

EAU Guidelines contributors are not expected to have no interests. They are expected to disclose all relevant relationships fully and promptly, and to comply with proportionate management measures. Interests will be assessed according to their relevance, magnitude, timing, and the individual's role. Most interests can be managed through transparency, balanced panel composition, independent review, restricted responsibilities, or recusal.

The Guidelines Office Board has final authority to classify high-risk conflicts and determine whether they can be managed, supported by independent advisory review where required by this policy. Deliberate non-disclosure, refusal to comply with a management plan, or a conflict that cannot be managed, may result in removal from the Guidelines panel.

Declarations must be completed through MyEAU before appointment, reviewed annually each September, updated within 30 days of a new interest or material change, and declared at relevant meetings.