

INEP Position Statement:
***CONFLICT-OF-INTEREST AND DISCLOSURE
IN EPIDEMIOLOGY***

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THE INEP MISSION

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INTERNATIONAL NETWORK FOR EPIDEMIOLOGY IN POLICY

INTEGRITY, EQUITY, AND EVIDENCE IN POLICIES IMPACTING HEALTH

INEP works at the interface of research and policy, serves the public interest, and maintains and protects the public's health by:

- ▶ creating and disseminating evidence-based knowledge about epidemiology,
- ▶ supporting capacity-building of experts to translate research and science into policy, and
- ▶ recognizing and highlighting the misuse of data and potential corruption of the science practiced by epidemiologists.

ON THE SHOULDERS OF OTHERS

This INEP Position Statement:

- ▶ Was started in 2014 and brought to fruition by a number of authors, contributors, and reviewers
- ▶ Was adapted from the work of several professional organizations
- ▶ **Was unanimously approved** by the INEP Board on September 16, 2020.
- ▶ Exceeded its required member organization **endorsement threshold** on December 24, 2020, **and was released** on January 5, 2021.

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- ▶ <https://epidemiologyinpolicy.org/members>

INEP MEMBERSHIP

AAP SOEPHE	American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Epidemiology, Public Health and Evidence
AEA	Australasian Epidemiological Association
APHA (Epi)	American Public Health Association, Epidemiology Section
CaSE	Cameroon Society of Epidemiology
CR	Collegium Ramazzini
CSEB	Canadian Society for Epidemiology and Biostatistics
DGEpi	German Society for Epidemiology
EOM	European Society for Environmental and Occupational Medicine
ISCHE	International Society for Children's Health and the Environment
ISEE	International Society for Environmental Epidemiology
ISPE	International Society for Pharmacoepidemiology
NACCHO	National Association of County & City Health Officials
RSE	Romanian Society of Epidemiology
RSPH	Royal Society for Public Health
SAAPHI	Society for the Analysis of African American Public Health Issues
SEE	Spanish Society of Epidemiology
* ABRASCO	Brazilian Association of Public Health
* ACE	American College of Epidemiology
* ADELFI	Association of French Language Epidemiologists
* AIE	Italian Association of Epidemiology
* CSTE	Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists
* IEA	International Epidemiological Association
* JEA	Japan Epidemiological Association
* PHASA	Public Health Association of South Africa

*** Eight of the 24 member organizations have yet to vote**

INTRODUCTION

- ▶ Never has TRUTH been under such assault and needed more to protect the public's health
- ▶ Science can be misused either intentionally, through error, or from bias.
- ▶ For centuries, intentional distortion of scientific methods, evidence, and miscommunication have been associated with Conflict-of-Interest (COI).
- ▶ COI-associated misuse of science can result from self-interest (financial stakes, liability protection, political interests, self-advancement, etc.)
- ▶ Increasing levels of sophistication are being employed that include coopting regulatory bodies, scientific panels, and communication forums.

INEP recognizes this and, through its Position Statement, proposes ways to better manage the problem in the public interest.

HOW DO COI PRACTICES AFFECT EPIDEMIOLOGY?

- ▶ Rather than an impartial analysis, scientists can produce and disseminate misinformation, engage in disinformation, and suppress data.
- ▶ The association between cause-and-effect can be obscured and denied.
- ▶ Scientific integrity can be undermined.
- ▶ Public trust in the science of epidemiology can be eroded.
- ▶ Workers, the public, and the environment can be harmed.

WHO IS IMPLICATED?

- ▶ Individual researchers
- ▶ Scientific journal authors
- ▶ Scientific reviewers
- ▶ Journal editors
- ▶ Corporate sponsors of journals
- ▶ Public health practitioners
- ▶ Policy-makers

WHAT IS IN THE INEP POSITION STATEMENT on *Conflict-of-Interest and Disclosure in Epidemiology?*

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- ▶ **Recent high-profile cases** exemplifying the misuse of epidemiologic research and the failure to disclose COI reported in the media and scientific literature.
- ▶ **Recent COI examples** developed by INEP co-authors and contributors.
- ▶ **A compendium of common practices used to distort and misapply epidemiological sciences.**
- ▶ INEP recommendations that include guidance and strategies for COI management by **Identification, Avoidance, Disclosure, and Recusal.**
- ▶ **<https://epidemiologyinpolicy.org/coi-d-position-statement>**

TO FIX IT YOU HAVE TO RECOGNIZE IT!

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CASE EXAMPLES: COI IDENTIFICATION, DISCLOSURE, AND GUIDANCES

1. Medical Research, Education and Practice
2. Tobacco Industry
3. Food Safety Panel
4. 2015 INEP Policy to Avoid COI through Donations
5. Recent Epidemiology-specific Examples of COI and Disclosure Issues (“a” to “l”; n=12)

WHY SO MANY RECENT EXAMPLES?

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TO ILLUSTRATE THE BREADTH, SCOPE, AND GROWING SOPHISTICATION OF THE PROBLEM

- a) 2016 CPI COI Exposé: “Science for Sale” on Scientific Boards, Councils, and Review Panels
- b) 2018 Collegium Ramazzini Statement: COI-related Principles for Safeguarding the Integrity of Research in Occupational and Environmental Health
- c) 2019 Commentary: How can the integrity of occupational and environmental health research be maintained in the presence of conflicting interests?
- d) 2019 Acquavella Commentary that COI Disclosure Harms Epidemiology: INEP member response
- e) 2020 Graziosi Article: Political COI of False Hurricane Claims
- f) 2020 Kaplan et al Article: COVID Pandemic Lapses in COI and Disclosure
- g) 2020 Unbalanced and Conflicted Science in AJPB Special Issue on E-Cigarettes
- h) 2020 Heindel Article: Undeclared COI in Biased Editorial Duplicated in 8 Toxicology Journals
- i) 2020 Hardell, Rivasi, and Buchner Letters / Reports: RF-EMF Hazard and COI of ICNIRP Analyses and Leadership
- j) 2015-2020 Caldwell-Soskolne Analysis of COPE Failure: Articles and Journal COI for Drinking Water Carcinogenicity
- k) **COI and Improper Influence through Meeting/Conference Sponsorship by Vested Interests: ISEE Guidelines for Donor Support**
- l) 2020 COI and Hill’s 1965 Viewpoints Used in Testimony for Causation in Civil Litigation

THE ISEE EXAMPLE (Example “k”): IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, DO SOMETHING!

k) COI and Improper Influence through Meeting/Conference Sponsorship by Vested Interests: ISEE Guidelines for Donor Support

- ▶ A problem of improper donor support was **identified**
- ▶ The problem was **disclosed** in meeting communications
- ▶ New guidance was given to **avoid** the problem in future

The ISEE example is helpful, showing us how to not cover things up, but rather confront them constructively.

A TOOLKIT OF EPIDEMIOLOGY DIRTY TRICKS – RECOGNIZE THE METHODS

The toolkit can be used:

- ▶ By peer-reviewers as a checklist of what to look for.
- ▶ To train epidemiologists and others on how epidemiology can be distorted.
- ▶ To review the literature for junk science or uninformative studies (e.g., underpowered studies).
- ▶ Identify who is misusing epidemiology.

The COPE guidelines are not enough to stop manipulation of the literature. The actions of the epidemiology community can help change this as the problems are recognized.

GOING FORWARD: INEP-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COI

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- a. Identification
- b. **Avoidance**
- c. Disclosure
- d. **Recusal**

FUTURE USES OF THE INEP POSITION STATEMENT

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- ▶ The Scientific community can recognize and call out common practices used to distort and misapply epidemiological science.
- ▶ INEP member organizations can adopt, update, and monitor COI disclosure protocols and scientific practices for their members; train young scientists to recognize and avoid COI.
- ▶ INEP member organizations, academic institutions, and other public health professionals can adopt INEP recommendations and strategies for COI management that include **identification, avoidance, disclosure, and recusal.**
- ▶ Individuals can be active as a peer-reviewer, editor, generator and teacher of science, and in policy and regulatory arenas to address these issues.

WHAT ABOUT EXPANDING UPON THE INEP EXAMPLE?

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► Issues not covered:

(1) What if someone is using a non-disclosure agreement to shield their COI?

(2) Is the chair of a review panel to be held to a higher standard than the panel members?

► Use the INEP document as a launching pad to write other documents (e.g., position statements, policy briefs, commentaries, letters, and editorials... to extend the reach of INEP's Position Statement).

Thank you for your interest in this topic!

Address any questions via e-mail to:

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This PPT presentation will be accessible on
Colin Soskolne's website under **ARCHIVE & LINKS**
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DISCUSSION