



Draft minutes of the 2024 Annual General Meeting of The Cochrane Collaboration ('Cochrane'), held online and in-person at The King's Fund, London on 14 November 2024 at 9:00am -10.30am UK time.

Trustees present:

Susan Phillips, Chair of the Governing Board and Chair of the meeting
Karen Kelly, Treasurer
Vanessa Piechotta, Trustee
Sally Green, Trustee
Juan Franco, Trustee
Tamara Kredo, Trustee

Senior staff of the Charity present in person and online:

Catherine Spencer, Chief Executive Officer
Karla Soares-Weiser, Editor in Chief, The Cochrane Library
Lucy Johnson-Brown, Head of Governance
Laura Ingle, Director of Publishing and Technology
Casey Early, Head of Finance and Corporate Services

Approximately 150 Cochrane members attended in-person or online.

A video recording of the Annual General Meeting (AGM) is available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8L7IDN7amM>

1. Welcome

Susan Phillips, Chair of the Governing Board, was in the Chair, attending online from Melbourne, Australia. She opened the meeting at 09:00 GMT+1 and welcomed everyone attending in-person and online. She covered some housekeeping details on questions and voting. Proper notice had been given, quorum was achieved, and therefore this was a duly constituted meeting

2. Approval of the Minutes

The Chair read out the first Resolution on which members would be asked to vote. The results of all Resolutions would be announced during the meeting once all votes had been counted.

The following Resolution was approved by the members:

APPROVED RESOLUTION:

To approve the Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting, held on 4 September 2023 (Yes: 89. Abstain:20)

3. Report from the Chair of the Governing Board

Susan Phillips, Chair of the Governing Board, thanked Jordi Pardo Pardo for serving as Interim Chair of the Board from September 2023 until June 2024.

She reported that since taking up her role as Chair of the Governing Board in July 2024, she had met the Executive Leadership Team, Central Executive Team staff and key partners at some of the international health organisations Cochrane has relationships with. She attended the Governing Board meeting in Prague in September 2024 and the Global Evidence Summit in the same location. The Summit had been a huge success with over 1,800 people from 71 countries present and included the announcement of a global evidence synthesis collaboration between Cochrane, JBI and the Campbell Collaboration.

The Chair reported that five elected members of the Board would come to the end of their term at the end of the year, three were eligible for re-election. The Board agreed to fill four elected positions in 2024 and to carry one over into 2025. There will be two vacancies among the appointed members which the Board could choose to fill in 2025 too; staggering the start dates of elected and appointed members will allow for improved continuity and succession planning.

Karen Kelly, the Treasurer would also come to the end of her term in December 2024, and the Chair thanked her for agreeing to extend her term to enable a hand over period with the new Treasurer. Nigel Jones who was appointed as a member of the Governing Board in September 2024 would begin his term as Treasurer in December 2024 having been appointed to the role by the Governing Board.

At least one member from a low- and middle-income country would be elected to the Governing Board during this round of elections. The Chair reminded members that voting would close on 15 November in all time zones and she encouraged members to cast their votes before the deadline. She thanked both elected and appointed members stepping down in 2024, for serving on the Board with unwavering dedication.

3. Report from the Treasurer

Karen Kelly, the Treasurer, presented an overview of the financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2023. Income of £9.7million and expenditure of £9.4million resulted in an operating surplus of £330,000. Over three quarters of the income was from Cochrane Library royalties. The organisation benefited from higher banking interest rates during the year and sales of RevMan Web also contributed to the results.

Total reserves of £9.9 million included £3million in Open Access contingency funds, £2.5 million in strategic reserves held for specific and organisation-wide change projects (£0.7m of which had been allocated), £2.6million as the minimum operating cashflow required and £1.7million of excess free reserves.

Looking ahead to 2024, the Treasurer anticipated that the forecast deficit of £1million was more likely to be in the region of -£0.4million. Diversifying income streams will be key to ensuring financial sustainability and a pathway towards Open Access had been agreed with Wiley.

Karen Kelly thanked the Director of Finance, Casey Early, and his team for the support provided throughout her years as Treasurer of the organisation.

APPROVED RESOLUTION: To receive the Trustees' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31st December 2023.
(Yes: 98. No: 1. Abstain: 10)

4. Appointment of the Auditor

The following Resolution was approved by the members:

APPROVED RESOLUTION: To approve Price Bailey as auditor until the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting 2025 (Yes: 95. No: 1. Abstain: 13)

5. Reports from the Chief Executive Officer

Catherine Spencer reported that at the start of 2024 after extensive consultation with the Community and external partners, the Governing Board approved an organisational strategy for 2024-2027. She said that the new strategy will bring a step change in the evidence synthesis community, advancing global health equity and democratizing evidence production. Working in collaboration with people and organisations across the world will make it reality.

The strategy included four goals:

Goal 1 focused on producing timely and relevant evidence; a new scientific strategy set out how prioritised evidence will help those in most need. Evidence production had been streamlined and simplified and new methods to address emerging issues while championing research integrity and transparency had been developed.

Goal 2 focused on getting evidence to the people who need it; the pathway to Open Access will ensure evidence is globally accessible; barriers to equitable participation will be identified and addressed and engagement in low- and middle-income countries will be enhanced.

Goal 3 focused on collaborating locally and globally. Working with partners to embed evidence-informed approaches will strengthen evidence synthesis capacity in low- and middle-income countries and will facilitate greater collaboration between Cochrane Groups. A community engagement exercise and a Cochrane Leaders' meeting in the second half of 2025 will help to ensure this goal is achieved.

Goal 4 will ensure Cochrane's long-term sustainability: income streams will be diversified to enable future ambitions to be achieved. Systems and processes will be reviewed and improved. The pathway towards Open Access will balance ambitions with financial sustainability.

The Chief Executive Officer reported that fundraising, communications, advocacy and Cochrane Response teams had all been busy over the last year and would continue to develop new ways of working in partnership. Donor briefs had been produced and institutional donors in the US, Germany and Japan approached.

Improved ways for the 135 Geographic groups in 55 countries to report on activity had been established and new collaboration agreements developed. The Chief Executive Officer thanked those who were translating the Cochrane Library into more languages.

Cochrane Malaysia marked their 10th anniversary in 2024, and overall membership of Cochrane reached nearly 11,000 members and 147,000 supporters.

Training continued to be delivered in a variety of different ways: the Learning Live webinars, the online Interactive Learning modules and Evidence Essentials. Three Cochrane Interactive Learning modules were being updated.

Finally, Catherine Spencer highlighted the essential role that consumers play in delivering Cochrane's organisational goals. Work to improve the representation of consumers from low- and middle-income countries will continue over the next year.

In closing, the Chief Executive Officer thanked the Governing Board, the Central Executive Team and the whole Cochrane Community for their work and support throughout the year.

6. Report from the Editor in Chief

Karla Soares-Weiser presented the Editor in Chief's report and shared some data and statistics. For the year 2023/2024, the Cochrane Library's impact factor was 8.8, there were over 12 million unique visitors to the Library, 77,000 citations of Cochrane reviews, 61% of WHO accredited guidelines mentioned at least one Cochrane review and users in 186 countries had full text access to the Cochrane Library. The figures were a cause for celebration and illustrated the organisation's global impact.

Improved ways of measuring and reporting on impact were being developed and the Scientific Strategy will guide the production of impact stories.

The Editor in Chief said that questions from the public, patients and policy makers change over time and that Cochrane needs to use collective skills to innovate in response. She thanked the Community for their contribution and for volunteering their time.

In addition to the seven new Thematic Groups established in 2023, the Governing Board had approved five additional ones:

Acute and Emergency Care.

Functioning, Disability and Rehabilitation.

Maternal, Newborn and Child Health.

Musculoskeletal Health and Pain

Planetary Health.

The first five new Evidence Synthesis Units had been established too: one in Australia (led by Sally Green), one in Iberoamerica and Spain (led by Eva Madrid), one in India (led by Menu Singh), one in Germany and UK (led by Nicole Skoetz), and one in Nigeria (led by Martin Meremikwu).

Thematic Groups and Evidence Synthesis Units will join Cochrane Review Groups in leading the development of Cochrane Systematic Reviews and all Cochrane groups can submit reviews to the Central Editorial Service.

As well as producing evidence synthesis, the Editor in Chief said that the Community is at the front line in methods developments and research integrity. New random effect methods were being implemented, and the Cochrane Handbook had been expanded to add rapid reviews prognosis and guidelines for the inclusion of non-randomised studies.

A new policy for updates was about to be launched and in the past year the team had worked on editorial policy, research integrity, management of pre-prints and retractions and a new policy for editorial complaints.

Collaborating with other organisation to develop an approach to the responsible use of AI in evidence synthesis would continue over the coming year.

Looking forward to the coming year and beyond, the Editor in Chief set out some key areas of focus which included addressing global health inequities by supporting the delivery of the sustainable development goals and working closely with the Cochrane Community in low- and middle-income countries. She said that cross-border, cross-disciplinary collaboration in evidence synthesis would be key to future access.

Four priority research areas set out in the Scientific Strategy will allow Cochrane to respond to the need of evidence users and work in a more agile way. The strategy reinforced Cochrane's commitment to collaboration, to involving the Community, innovating in methods, championing research integrity, and promoting health equity.

New and improved ways of communicating with those who produce evidence need to be developed and over the following months. A new Community of practice will bring together Review Groups, Thematic Groups, Geographic Groups, Consumers and everyone interested in producing evidence.

In closing, the Editor in Chief thanked members for their contribution and reassured the audience that the central team is committed to improving processes, ways of working and communication in partnership with the Community.

7. Members' questions

A number of questions from attendees online were taken. They included:

How do we ensure that consumers/patients are included in the strategic objectives and plans going forward?

Catherine Spencer, the Chief Executive Officer confirmed that a Cochrane engagement and involvement framework had been developed under Richard Morley's supervision and was now with the new Consumer Officer, April English and would be used during implementation of the Scientific Strategy.

What was the outturn of the London Colloquium?

Casey Early, the Director of Finance and Corporate Services said that the London Colloquium was a successful event in many ways. It didn't achieve the expected number of paying participants or the anticipated income from corporate sponsorship and made an overall loss of £150,000.

The Executive Leadership Team recognized the importance of face-to-face events. The associated costs are high, and more works need to be done to make attendance at events more equitable, particularly for people from low- and middle-income countries.

What will replace the Council and how does the Community of Practice differ from the Council?

Lucy Johnson-Brown, Head of Governance, said that after the Council was disbanded in September 2023, a working group was set up to consider new and improved ways of engaging across Cochrane large, diverse Community. The working group met several times during the year and provided some recommendations to the Governing Board which were considered in September 2024. The working group and the Board agreed that a one-size fits all solution doesn't work and that the role and responsibilities of the Council had become ambiguous over time. A number of new and improved ways of engaging with community will be developed. The Community of Practice, the Leadership Meeting and a listening exercise will all inform next steps.

Susan Phillips, Chair of the Governing Board thanked the members of the working group and Jordi Pardo Pardo especially for their input.

Are there plans to make something similar to the Geogroups' platform of achievements for other groups to learn from each other?

Catherine Spencer said that a number of initiatives will be developed over the next year to share information and learn more about collaborating more effectively across the Community.

When will the Leadership Event take place?

Catherine Spencer confirmed it would take place in September or October 2025.

Will the Open Access policy suppress the engagement of Cochrane reviewers for additional publication payment of their own work?

Karla Soares-Weiser, the Editor in Chief responded, she said that the roadmap to Open Access had been developed to ensure that the financial burden of producing reviews doesn't fall on authors.

8. Awards and Prizes

The following awards and prizes were presented by Vanessa Piechotta, Chair of the Membership and Awards Committee:

Emeritus and Lifetime Membership Awards

These awards recognize extraordinary contributions to Cochrane's success over many years from members who are ending their active time with Cochrane.

Emeritus

Teresa Anna Cantisani
Chris Champion
Zbys Fedorowicz
Marguerite Koster
Chris Mavergames
Ann Merete Moller
Nathan Pace

Lifetime

Marty Chaplin
Richard Morley

Information about the individuals' achievements can be found on the Cochrane Community website.

The Anne Anderson Award 2024

The award is given to a female member of Cochrane who has made a significant contribution to the enhancement and visibility of women's participation within the organisation.

Dr. Madelon Van Wely, the 2023 recipient presented the 2024 award to Prof. Rachelle Buchbinder.

The Bill Silverman Prize 2024

This prize was not awarded in 2024 and nominations for next year were welcomed.

The Chris Silagy Prize 2024

This prize goes to an individual who had made an extraordinary contribution to the work of Cochrane that would not be recognized outside the scope of this prize.

Muriah Umoquit, the 2023 recipient presented the 2024 award to Richard Morley.

The Kenneth Warren Prize 2024

The prize goes to the principal author of a systematic review, published in The Cochrane Library by a national living in a low- and middle-income country, that is judged to be both of high methodological quality and relevant to health problems in developing countries.

Nishaint Jaiswal, the 2023 recipient presented the 2024 award to Dr Shaun Lee.

8. Resolutions: Results of members' votes

The Chair presented the results of the resolutions. All resolutions were approved by the majority of people who voted.

9. Any Other Business

No items of other business had been raised in advance of the meeting.

10. Date of next Annual General Meeting

The date of the Annual General Meeting in 2025 will be confirmed next year.

The Chair thanked the speakers and members for their participation and closed the meeting at 10.15 UK time.