Reviewer's report

Title: A systematic review of the effect of retention methods in population-based cohort studies.

Version: 1 Date: 23 November 2010

Reviewer: Jonathan VanGeest

Reviewer's report:

1) Major Compulsory Revisions:

Would recommend that the authors update their literature review. The most current citation listed (one) is the 2009 chapter by Laurie and Lynn. While not exhaustive, other potential articles to consider may include: Henderson et al, BMC Med Res Methodol (2010), Davies et al, BMC Geriatr (2010), and Vega et al., J Clin Epidemiol (2010).

2) Minor Essential Revisions:


May also consider evidence that extended recruitment efforts that minimize attrition may not necessary reduce bias (see for example, the article by Haring et al. J Clin Epidemiol (2009).

3) Discretionary Revisions:

Page 3, top paragraph. Following sentence on “selective attrition,” I would recommend that the authors be clearer in terms of risk groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, gender, age, and socioeconomic status. Racial and ethnic minorities, in particular, have been a challenge due to their well-deserved mistrust in health studies generally and they deserve mention here. Contextual factors impacting retention might also be discussed (see, for example, the article by Seibold-Simpson and Morrison-Beedy, West J Nurs Research (2010).

Page 5, bottom of the page. Would recommend that the authors explore the possibility of including studies (as available) on design–based retention studies.

Discussion: Would recommend that the authors explore opportunities for mixed-method (including web-based) response. Also encourage the authors to explore potential population variances in methodologies to improve retention, as it’s not clear that all methods will work equally well across different population groups. Would recommend editing the top paragraph (page 14) to make this point.
Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests.