Reviewer's report

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

Version: 1 Date: 29 December 2010

Reviewer: Flora Tzelepis

Reviewer's report:

This review paper is very well written and examines retention methods in population-based cohort studies. Given that large levels of attrition can impact the generalisability of study findings, this review assesses an important topic.

Major Compulsory Revisions
Nil

Minor Essential Revisions
Methods, second paragraph: ‘..searched to include for studies published through June, 2007’ could be changed to read ‘..searched to include studies published through to June, 2007’ (minor issue not for publication)

Results, first paragraph & Figure 1: In the text, the authors state that 17,205 papers were found, however Figure 1 reports 17,210. Please correct either the text or Figure 1 to ensure this information is consistent.

Figure 1: In the Excluded (n=623), No information on strategies (n=577) box the reason for why the 46 studies (the difference between these numbers) were excluded is unclear. Please specify the reason.

Figure 1: In the Excluded from review (n=265), No evaluation (n=245) box the reason for why the 20 studies (the difference between these numbers) were excluded is unclear. Please specify the reason.

Figure 1: It is unclear how n=32 in the 'Included papers' box. 290-265=25+6=31. Could the authors please check the numbers in Figure 1 and correct as needed. Is the paper identified through personal communication missing from Figure 1’s count?

Discussion, seventh paragraph: The statement ‘A recent review of studies that used either face-to-face or telephone interviews, conditional…’ could be changed to read ‘In a recent review of studies that used either face-to-face or telephone interviews, conditional…’ (minor issue not for publication)

Discussion, eighth paragraph: ‘…showed that retention rates increased with the number methods used…’ should read ‘…showed that retention rates increased with the number of methods used…’ (minor issue not for publication)

Reference 64: change ‘screenging’ to ‘screening’ (minor issue not for publication)

Table 1: Kalsbeek (1995) row – ‘Telphone’ should read ‘Telephone’ (minor issue
not for publication)
Table 1: Michaud (2005) row – ‘questionniare’ should read ‘questionnaire’ (minor issue not for publication)
Additional Table 1: Rodgers (unpublished) row – Evaluated Retention Strategy column- change 30 pounds to ‘$30’ (minor issue not for publication)
Additional Table 1: Boys (2003) row – ‘Stared in 2000’ should read ‘Started in 2000’ (minor issue not for publication)

Discretionary Revisions
Introduction, second paragraph: The authors point out that the reasons for attrition may differ for randomised trials and therefore the review focuses exclusively on cohort studies. However, given the cohort studies described have RCTs of retention strategies embedded within them it may be worthwhile specifying that RCTs evaluating the effectiveness of ‘treatment/support’ only have been excluded.

Figure 1: ‘Excluded: Recruitment (n=3,701)’ label could be renamed to ‘Excluded: Recruitment only (n=3,701)’ to make the reason for exclusion clearer.

Figure 1: ‘No information on strategies (n=577)’ label could be renamed to ‘No information on retention strategies (n=577)’ to make the reason for exclusion clearer.

Figure 1: ‘No evaluation (n=245)’ label could be renamed to ‘No evaluation of retention strategies (n=245)’ to make the reason for exclusion clearer.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests