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What are health utilities?

- **Utilities are cardinal values** that represent the strength of an individual's preferences for specific health-related outcomes.
- Measuring health utilities involves two main steps: **defining a set of health states** of interest, and **valuing those health states**. There are **direct** or **indirect** methods of utility valuation.
- The methods that have been used to collect data on utilities include the **standard gamble approach**, the **time trade-off approach** and the **visual analogue approach**.
- The main indirect methods of utility measurement are: the use of **generic preference instruments** (EQ-5D, SF-6D and HUI); the use of **disease-specific preference measures**; and **mapping from a disease-specific health-related quality of life instrument to a generic instrument**.
- Generic preference-based measures are increasingly being used in **cost-utility analyses of pharmaceutical and other healthcare interventions**. In the UK, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has specified the EQ-5D as its preferred method of utility measurement.
- Utilities have been used as the **preference weights** (quality levels) within the quality-adjusted life-year model – an increasingly popular outcome measure used in pharmaceutical market access decision-making.

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