

Global Network of WHO Collaborating Centres for Bioethics

Terms of Reference

19 April 2024

1. Vision

WHO Collaborating Centers for Bioethics (CCs) are key institutions with relevant expertise distributed throughout the world. They represent an essential resource in support of the WHO's capacity to implement its health ethics mandate. The quality and validity of WHO's work on ethics is enhanced by ongoing collaboration and dialogue with academic centers. In this respect, WHO encourages connections and synergies between its CCs to achieve enhanced results, to facilitate resource mobilization and to strengthen (institutional) capacity, in particular at regional levels. WHO is committed to the development of CCs for Bioethics in low- and middle income countries and encourages active partnership between CCs in high- and low resource settings. The Global Network of WHO Collaborating Centres for Bioethics (hereinafter referred to as "the Network") has been created to advance these aims.

2. Mission

The Network will support the three levels of WHO (Headquarters, Regional Offices, Country Offices) to implement its mandated work in the field of health ethics and governance, which relates to one of WHO's core functions, namely "Articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options" (WHO's 13th Global Programme of Work).¹

The Network will focus its collaborative activities in a number of key domains including, but not limited to: public health ethics, research ethics, and clinical ethics.

¹ [Thirteenth general programme of work 2019-2025 \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/thirteenth-general-programme-of-work-2019-2025)

3. Membership

Network members include:

- All officially designated WHO Collaborating Centres for Bioethics
- WHO-Headquarters Health Ethics and Governance Unit
- WHO Regional Programs/focal points for Bioethics

4. Structure

Secretariat

The WHO-HQ Health Ethics and Governance Unit provides the Permanent Secretariat function.

Chair & Vice-Chair

The Network is chaired on a rotational basis by a Chair and a Vice-chair chosen from the Directors or Co-Directors of the WHO Collaborating Centres for Bioethics. The Chair and Vice-chair will serve a 2-year term. The Chair and Vice-Chair will normally be decided by consensus of the Network members and appointed by WHO HQ. Geographical and gender balance will be key considerations.

5. Roles & responsibilities

The Secretariat will:

- Maintain membership data
- Facilitate communication of WHO objectives and directions
- Facilitate collaboration with other programs within WHO HQ and Regional Offices
- Encourage twinning arrangements between complementary institutions (in terms of geography or area of work) and aim to strengthen newly-established institutions in low-and middle income countries
- Disseminate information on the Network to key stakeholders, such as WHO Member States and other international organisations
- Maintain the Network website
- Lead the development of the joint workplan of the Network
- Work with the Chair in planning the meetings of the Network
- Monitor progress on the Network annual workplan

The Chair will:

- Chair virtual and in-person meetings
- Coordinate planning for the meetings of the Network
- Communicate agendas and relevant content to members
- Support the Secretariat in the development of an annual workplan
- Coordinate with Secretariat staff on the preparation of regular progress reports of WHO-CC activities
- Ensure active participation of all the members and seek consensus in decision-making

The Vice-Chair will:

- Stand-in for the Chair in their absence, i.e., to chair meetings
- In collaboration with the Chair, will support the Secretariat with the planning of virtual meetings and the annual Network meeting
- To take over other responsibilities from the Chair as needed

Network members will:

- Initiate and participate in joint projects as a leading or collaborating institutions, responding to WHO's needs and requests
- Participate actively in setting priorities for collaboration
- Identify research projects
- Identify funding sources
- Attend meetings of the Network
- Contribute to preparation of progress reports of the Network's activities
- Coordinate with the Secretariat to ensure progress on the Network's workplan

6. Meetings

Meetings will be held at least twice per year by teleconference or more frequently at the call of the Chair. A face-to-face meeting will be held every year, if funding resources permit.

7. Decision-making on Network matters

The Network will make decisions by consensus as far as possible. In case consensus cannot be reached, the decision will be made by a simple majority of the member institutions.