

Terms of Reference WHO Science Council

Faced with new and re-emerging global health challenges, the World Health Organization (WHO) strives to be pro-active in identifying and positioning itself in the new and often complex science and innovation areas that might have direct impact on public health. The Global Program of Work¹ (2019-2023) articulates WHO's role and leadership in science and innovation.

The WHO Science Division, established in March 2019, has two main functions: (1) to ensure WHO anticipates and remains abreast of the latest scientific developments and identifies opportunities to harness those developments to improve global health and (2) to ensure the excellence, relevance and efficacy of WHO's core technical functions, including global public health goods that are norms and standards and research.

The WHO Director-General has decided to establish a WHO Science Council as the voice of scientific leadership advising WHO on high-priority scientific issues, and advances in science and technology that could directly impact global health. The Science Division, through the Research for Health department, will facilitate the Council's activity in setting the top WHO science, research and innovation priorities, independently from programme specifics, and focusing on areas where gaps exist.

A global Science Council of experts can forge a strong and enduring connection between the global science community and WHO. External advice from the global research community is essential in informing and equipping WHO to respond to cutting-edge health issues and providing expert advice to Member States, so as to influence policy decisions around these issues.

The Science Council (the "SC") will act as an advisory body to WHO in this field.

I. Functions

In its capacity as an advisory body to WHO, the SC shall have the following functions:

- Evaluate urgent, high-priority scientific issues and provide input and guidance on translating them to public health guidelines and otherwise in furtherance of WHO's mission;
- Identify current and emerging science and technology issues that WHO needs to address, including global health threats, and new advances with a potential for direct or indirect impact on global health;
- Provide strategic orientation to WHO's actions in science, research and innovation;

¹ <https://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/thirteenth-general-programme-of-work-2019---2023>

- Participate in the rapid and confidential review of WHO normative products, when requested by the Director-General or the Chief Scientist; and
- Undertake other duties and functions consistent with these Terms of Reference, when requested by the Director General or the Chief Scientist.

II. Composition

1. The SC shall have up to 15 members², who shall serve in their personal capacities to represent the broad range of disciplines relevant to global health and emerging technologies. In the selection of the SC members, consideration shall be given to attaining an adequate distribution of technical expertise, geographical representation and gender balance.
2. Members of the SC shall be selected and appointed by WHO³ following an open call for experts.
3. A Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson will be selected by WHO. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson will serve for two years after which another Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson will be selected. A Vice-Chairperson may be elected as Chairperson following their term. The Chairperson's functions include the following:
 - to chair the meeting of the SC;
 - to liaise with the WHO Secretariat between meetings;
 - to work with the WHO Secretariat to develop the meetings agendas.

In case of unexpected resignation or inability of the Chairperson to attend SC meetings or perform their role, the Vice-Chairperson will temporarily assume the Chairperson role. In addition, the Vice-Chairperson will support the Chairperson's function, and may lead sub-working groups of the SC.

4. In case of less than four Council vacancies, suggestions of candidates may be obtained from Council members and WHO staff.
5. Members of the SC shall be appointed to serve for a period of 2 years and shall be eligible for reappointment. A Chairperson is eligible for reappointment as a member of the SC, but is only permitted to serve as Chairperson for one term. Their appointment and/or designation as Chairperson may be terminated at any time by WHO if WHO's interest so requires or, as otherwise specified in these terms of reference or letters of appointment. Where a member's appointment is terminated, WHO may decide to appoint a replacement member.
6. SC members must respect the impartiality and independence required of WHO. In performing their work, members may not seek or accept instructions from any Government or from any authority external to the Organization. They must be free of any real, potential

² Members serve as full participants and partake in the deliberations and the adoption of the recommendations of the meeting in which they are involved.

or apparent conflicts of interest. To this end, proposed members/members shall be required to complete a declaration of interests form and their appointment, or continuation of their appointment, shall be subject to the evaluation of completed forms by the WHO Secretariat, determining that their participation would not give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict of interest.

7. Following a determination that a proposed member's participation in the SC would not give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict-of-interest, the proposed member will be sent a letter inviting them to be a member of the SC. Their appointment to the SC is subject to WHO receiving the countersigned invitation letter and letter of agreement. Notwithstanding the requirement to complete the WHO declaration-of-interest form, SC members have an ongoing obligation to inform the WHO of any interests real or perceived that may give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict-of-interest.
8. As contemplated in paragraph II.6 above, WHO may, from time to time, request SC members to complete a new declaration-of-interest form. This may be before a SC meeting or any other SC-related activity or engagement, as decided by WHO. Where WHO has made such a request, the SC member's participation in the SC activity or engagement is subject to a determination that their participation would not give rise to a real, potential or apparent conflict-of-interest.
9. Where a SC member is invited by WHO to travel to an in-person SC meeting, WHO shall, subject to any conflict-of-interest determination as set out in paragraph II.6 above, issue a letter of appointment as a temporary adviser and accompanying memorandum of agreement (together 'Temporary Adviser Letter'). WHO shall not authorize travel by an SC member, until it receives a countersigned Temporary Adviser Letter.
10. SC members do not receive any remuneration from the Organization for any work related to the SC. However, when attending in-person meetings at the invitation of WHO, their travel cost and per diem shall be covered by WHO in accordance with the applicable WHO rules and policies.

III. Operation

1. The SC shall normally meet at least three times each year. However, WHO may convene additional meetings. SC meetings may be held in person (at WHO headquarters in Geneva or another location, as determined by WHO) or virtually, via video or teleconference.

SC meetings may be held in open and/or closed session, as decided by the Chairperson in consultation with WHO.

- (a) Open sessions: Open sessions shall be convened for the sole purpose of the exchange of non-confidential information and views and may be attended by Observers (as defined in paragraph III.3 below).

(b) Closed sessions: The sessions dealing with the formulation of recommendations and/or advice to WHO shall be restricted to the members of the SC and essential WHO Secretariat staff.

2. The quorum for SC meetings shall be two thirds of the members.
3. WHO may, at its sole discretion, invite external individuals from time to time to attend the open sessions of an advisory group, or parts thereof, as “observers”. Observers may be invited either in their personal capacity, or as representatives from a governmental institution / intergovernmental organization, or from a non-State actor. WHO will request observers invited in their personal capacity to complete a confidentiality undertaking and a declaration of interests form prior to attending a session of the SC. Invitations to observers attending as representatives from non-State actors will be subject to WHO internal due diligence and risk assessment including conflict of interest considerations in accordance with the Framework for engagement with non-State actors (FENSA). Observers invited as representatives may also be requested to complete a confidentiality undertaking. Observers shall normally attend meetings of the SC at their own expense and be responsible for making all arrangements in that regard.

At the invitation of the Chairperson, observers may be asked to present their personal views and/or the policies of their organization. Observers will not participate in the process of adopting recommendations of the SC.

4. The SC may decide to establish smaller working groups (sub-groups of the SC) to work on specific issues. Their deliberations shall take place via teleconference or video-conference. For these sub-groups, no quorum requirement will apply; the outcome of their deliberations will be submitted to the SC for review at one of its meetings.
5. SC members are expected to attend meetings. If a member misses two consecutive meetings, WHO may end his/her appointment as a member of the SC.
6. A yearly report shall be submitted by the SC to WHO Director-General. All recommendations from the SC are advisory to WHO, who retains full control over any subsequent decisions or actions regarding any proposals, policy issues or other matters considered by the SC.
7. The SC shall normally make recommendations by consensus. If, in exceptional circumstances, a consensus on a particular issue cannot be reached, minority opinions will be reflected in the meeting report.
8. Active participation is expected from all SC members, including in working groups, teleconferences, and interaction over email. SC members may, in advance of SC meetings, be requested to review meeting materials and to provide their views for consideration by the SC.
9. WHO shall determine the modes of communication by the SC, including between WHO and the SC members, and the SC members among themselves.

10. SC members shall not speak on behalf of, or represent, the SC or WHO to any third party.

IV. Secretariat

WHO shall provide the secretariat for the SC, including necessary scientific, technical, administrative and other support. In this regard, the WHO Secretariat shall provide the members in advance of each meeting with the agenda, working documents and discussion papers. Distribution of the aforesaid documents to Observers will be determined by the WHO Secretariat. The meeting agenda shall include details such as: whether a meeting, or part thereof, is closed or open; and whether Observers are permitted to attend.

V. Information and documentation

1. Information and documentation to which members may gain access in performing SC related activities shall be considered as confidential and proprietary to WHO and/or parties collaborating with WHO. In addition, by counter signing the letter of appointment and the accompanying terms and conditions referred to in section II(5) above, SC members undertake to abide by the confidentiality obligations contained therein and also confirm that any and all rights in the work performed by them in connection with, or as a result of their SC-related activities shall be exclusively vested in WHO.
2. SC members and Observers shall not quote from, circulate or use SC documents for any purpose other than in a manner consistent with their responsibilities under these Terms of Reference.
3. WHO retains full control over the publication of the reports of the SC, including deciding whether or not to publish them.