Background and rationale

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 Work\(^1\) (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 Director-General has decided to establish a WHO Science Council as the voice of scientific leadership directly advising WHO about 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 provide expert advice to Member States, so as to influence policy decisions around these issues.

Membership

The WHO Science Council (hereinafter referred to as “Council”) will consist of not more than 15 members who shall serve in individual capacity and will not represent institutions or countries. Members shall represent a broad array of scientific disciplines relevant to global health and emerging technologies. In the selection of members, consideration will be given to ensuring an adequate technical distribution of expertise, geographical representation and gender balance.

The Council will draw upon the full range of medical and scientific expertise. Its key selection criteria will be scientific excellence and strategic insight, complemented by diversity in perspectives and experiences.

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\(^1\) https://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/thirteenth-general-programme-of-work-2019---2023
Members of the Council, including the Chair, shall be selected and appointed by the WHO Director-General following an open call for applications. Members will be selected based on their qualifications and outstanding record in the relevant disciplines. To ensure an appropriate balance of disciplines, geographical representation and gender, WHO reserves the right to directly appoint suitably qualified candidates. Each proposed member will be required to complete a WHO declaration of interest (DOI) form, and her/his appointment by the WHO Director-General as a Council member will be subject to the WHO Secretariat having evaluated the completed declaration of interest from and determining that her/his participation would not give rise to a real, potential or perceived conflict of interest. Membership appointment will be subject to WHO receiving the countersigned invitation letter and accompanying terms and conditions, as well as the Confidentiality Undertaking. The invitation letter will additionally advise that all rights, including title, copyright and patent rights, in any work produced by the Council by virtue of their membership shall be vested in WHO, which alone shall hold all rights of use. Where a member of the Council is invited by WHO to travel to an in-person Council meeting, WHO will, subject to any conflict of interest determination as set out above, issue a letter of appointment as a temporary adviser and accompanying memorandum of agreement (together ‘Temporary Adviser Letter). WHO will not authorize travel by a Council member, until it receives a countersigned Temporary Adviser Letter.

Members of the Council shall be appointed for an initial term of two years. This term may be renewed by WHO once for an additional period of up to two years to ensure a staggered replacement of members. Members must respect the impartiality and independence required of WHO. In performing their work, they may not seek or accept instructions from any government of any authority external to the Organization. Membership in the Council may be terminated by WHO with immediate effect in writing for any of the following reasons: 1. Failure to attend two consecutives Council meetings; or 2. Any change that is deemed by WHO to give rise to a real, potential or perceived conflict of interest and failure to inform WHO of any changes in a timely manner or 3. A breach of any of the terms contained in WHO’s invitation letter and accompanying Memorandum of Agreement, Terms and Conditions for Temporary Advisors. When four or more members need to be replaced, WHO may issue an open call for interest, screen and select candidates based on experience and expertise needed. In case of less than four Council vacancies, suggestions of candidates may be obtained from Council members and WHO staff.

Each expert member has the right to withdraw from participation in the Council at any time, subject to providing WHO with three (3) months’ prior written notice and to the orderly conclusion of any ongoing activities.

Chair

The Chair of the Council is appointed by the WHO Director-General from among the selected members. The Chair has the following functions: 1. To chair the meetings of the Council; and 2. to liaise with the WHO Secretariat between meetings (including with regard to the preparation of
draft agendas and other documents to be submitted to the Council). In case of unexpected inability of the Chair of the Council to attend Council meeting, the WHO Secretariat will select a temporary replacement from among the existing members. In appointing a Chair, consideration shall be given to gender and geographical rotation.

**Role and responsibilities**

In the exercise of their advisory function, members of the Council shall serve in their personal capacity as international experts advising WHO exclusively; and in that capacity they shall provide WHO with the best possible advice.

The Council will 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 new 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;
- 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 Chief Scientist.

As outlined above, information and documentation to which members may gain access in performing Council related activities will be considered as confidential and proprietary to WHO and/or parties collaborating with WHO, that WHO has given express access to. Members will not be permitted to give access to documents/share information with any parties collaborating with WHO without WHO’s approval. Council members shall not purport to speak on behalf of, represent the Council or WHO to any third party. All proposed members will be required to agree to appropriate obligations of confidentiality and provisions on ownership. Council members do not receive any remuneration from the Organization for any work related to the Council. 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.

**Meetings and operational procedures**

The Council will ordinarily meet three times per year. Frequency may however be adjusted by WHO as necessary. The Council meetings may either be held in person (at WHO headquarters in Geneva or another location as determined by WHO) or through video- or teleconferences. WHO Science Division will act as the Secretariat for the Council and convene meetings, develop with the meeting agendas and provide any necessary scientific, technical and other support.

*WHO Science Council – Terms of Reference*
Council members will be asked to update their Declaration of Interest (DOI) before each meeting. If based on the information disclosed in the updated DOI, WHO determines that a member’s participation in the meeting gives rise to a real, potential or perceived conflict of interest, this may lead to the partial or total exclusion from the meeting in question. The Council will, as a rule, develop its recommendations by consensus. If a consensus cannot be reached, minority views and opinions shall be reflected in the report. Following each meeting of the Council, the Chair, with the support of the WHO Secretariat, shall prepare a report of the discussions, including the advice and recommendations proposed by the Council. This report will, once adopted by all the members, be submitted to the WHO Director-General.

Representatives from intergovernmental organizations and non-State actors in official relations with WHO\(^2\), as well as members of other technical advisory groups of the WHO may be invited by WHO to attend the open sessions of the Council, or parts thereof\(^3\). For the purposes of these terms of reference, such invitees will be referred to as “observers”. WHO, at its discretion, may request members of other technical advisory groups of the WHO to complete a declaration of interests form which will be cleared prior to attending any Council meeting.

All recommendations from the Council are advisory to WHO, which retains full control over any subsequent decisions or actions regarding any proposals, policy issues or other matters considered by the Council. WHO also retains full control over the publication of the reports of the Council, including whether or not to publish them and/or otherwise disseminate them, including by submitting them to the World Health Assembly and by posting them on the WHO website.

WHO also has the right, exercisable in its sole discretion, to close the Council, to terminate any membership, at any time upon providing written notice thereof to the member(s) concerned.

**Consultations and Hearings with non-State actors**

The Council may conduct consultations and hearings with non-State actors to advance a specific agenda item of its work. These consultations and hearings will be conducted in line with WHO rules, policies and procedures and in accordance with the following elements:

- Consultations includes any physical or virtual meeting, organized for the purpose of exchanging information and views. Reports on consultations and Inputs received from non-State actors shall be made publicly available.

\(^2\) A list of non-State actors in official relations is updated on annual base following approval by Member States and its accessible on WHO’s website: [https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/non-state-actors-in-official-relations-with-who](https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/non-state-actors-in-official-relations-with-who). Should official relations be discontinued with a non-State actor, the latter will not be invited to attend the open sessions.

\(^3\) Due diligence and risk assessment (in particular conflict of interest) should be conducted on observers representing non-State actors, and subject to clearance, representatives may be invited. Observers shall attend open sessions of the Council at their own expense and be responsible for making all arrangements in that regard.

*WHO Science Council – Terms of Reference*
• Hearings are meetings in which the participants can present their evidence, views and positions and be questioned about them but do not enter into a debate. Hearings can be virtual or in person. All interested entities should be invited on the same basis. The participants and positions presented during hearings shall be documented and shall be made publicly available.
• Selection criteria and draft agenda, would be drafted and agreed upon by WHO and geographical representation and fair representation among the four categorizes of non-State actors apply;
• Invited entities should submit tobacco-arms disclosure statement duly signed and additional documents to facilitate their screening and conflict of interest should be assessed.