Request for expressions of interest – WHO initiative to evaluate PFAS

The World Health Organization (WHO) is seeking expressions of interest from institutions or individual(s) to conduct a landscape review on the health effects and sources of exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and develop a methodology for an in-depth assessment.

This work would enable WHO in the future, to undertake a more in-depth assessment of PFAS on the key health end-points of concern, with the view to establish health-based values.

We welcome expressions of interest for the listed Work Packages or any specific or combined element(s) of the Work Packages. Deadline for applications: 12 January 2023 (full application details in section 5).

1. Background

Public health concern about human exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), including from exposure through drinking-water and food, is increasing. A number of countries and authorities have published or proposed guidance values for PFAS in drinking-water in recent years, but the values which have been proposed vary considerably. New data for these substances are continually published, and there are significant uncertainties in the extrapolation of laboratory toxicological data to human health effects for these chemicals, which means that assessments rely significantly on expert judgement. Hence, there is a lack of consensus about the levels of PFAS which may be a health concern.

Given the discrepancies in values established or proposed by various authorities, a systematic collection and assessment of the evidence is warranted to establish health-based values.

2. Work Packages

Work package 1: Landscape review on health effects of PFAS
This work package will involve
- the development of protocol to undertake a landscape review, identify existing scoping reviews databases and systematic evidence maps of health effects and exposure to PFAS and screen these data sources, to identify the most relevant PFAS of interest individually and in combination
- the preparation of a synthesis of the evidence available, with a summary and conclusions including identifying areas for more in-depth assessment (individual and combined substances and key health end-points) and data gaps

Work package 2: Methodology development for an in-depth assessment of the risk to human health of PFAS from exposure via ingestion
This work package will involve
- the development of protocols for systematic collection of evidence on the key human health effects and occurrence/exposure for key PFAS in water and food
review methodologies to derive health-based guidance values, considering mixture approaches (combined and cumulative exposure) and propose the methodology to apply to derive health-based guidance values for PFAS

Work package 3: Provide guidance to ensure that the activities listed under the above work packages align with best practices in collection, synthesis and review of the evidence

Interested contractors are invited to apply to one or a combination of work packages. Note that the outputs from all three work packages would be informed by expert meetings. The contractor(s) is also expected to provide advice on the composition of the expert working group and technical content for the meetings.

3. Specific requirements:

Qualifications and experience required:
One or more of the following:
- Experience in scientific areas related to chemical safety; toxicology; exposure and risk assessments, preferably including for PFAS
- Experience with systematic reviews, evidence maps and/or evidence synthesis for complex chemical issues
- Familiarity with WHO’s requirements for developing normative publications

4. Timeframes

This work is anticipated to start in Q1 2024 and be completed by the end of 2024. There is a possibility for follow up work beyond this time frame.

5. Application details

Submission of application package:
Applications should be submitted by email by midnight GMT on 12 January 2024 to ipcsmail@who.int and include:
- Up-to-date curriculum vitae of staff to be involved
- Summary statement outlining:
  - Specific areas of interest from the above Work Packages (listed Work Packages and/or any combined element(s) of the Work Packages)
  - Expertise and experience relevant for the role(s)
  - Confirmation of availability during 2024
  - Daily rates

Applicants should also note that they will be required to comply with WHO policies regarding declaration of interests if selected to participate in this work.

Applicants will be contacted by email by end of January 2024.