

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN ALLIANCE

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

DRAFT

1. What is the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance (HECA)?

The Healthy Environments for Children Alliance (HECA) is a world-wide effort to create healthier environments for children. HECA will catalyse coordinated action to tackle major environment and poverty-related risks to children's health through inclusive, participatory and action-oriented efforts within local communities and at national and global levels. It will serve to tackle the environmental risks to children's health in the settings where they live, learn and play, and sometimes, work/earn.

2. What is its mission?

A world-wide alliance to intensify global action on environmental risks to children's health that arise from the settings where they live, learn, play and earn, by providing knowledge, increasing political will, mobilizing resources, and catalysing action.

3. What are its core functions?

HECA will focus initially on a limited number of areas in which it can make the most difference and add value, building credibility and achieving success, and then broadening in scope as it develops. HECA aims to:

- Ensure advocacy and awareness raising;
- Provide knowledge, information exchange and expertise for decision-making;
- Promote effective policies and action, at all levels, in all sectors;
- Support countries and communities in creating and maintaining healthy environments for children;
- Monitor and evaluate progress.

4. What is the process for organizing the development of HECA?

To facilitate the work of the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance (HECA), three bodies have been established:

1. The WHO HECA Task Force – an internal WHO body to assist in the development of the Alliance and advise on WHO activities in support of healthy environments for children.
2. The Interim Alliance-building Task Force (ABTF) – established as a result of the first HECA stakeholder meetings held in December 2002 to build on the outcomes of the meetings and develop the alliance further. The ABTF involves a wide range of stakeholders/interested parties.
3. The HECA Secretariat – established to serve as the engine and executing body of the Alliance.

5. Why do we need HECA?

Evidence indicates that healthy environments for children warrants greater world-wide attention and scaled-up efforts. The World Health Report 2002 on Risks to Health confirmed the large number of healthy life years lost as a result of health risks associated with the environments in which people live. The risks faced by children were especially severe with more than 5 million child deaths linked every year to unhealthy environments.

Although there are many activities underway around the world, these could benefit from better coordination, streamlining of efforts, bringing together fragmented or isolated initiatives, and eliminating unnecessary overlap and duplication.

6. Why concentrate on children and environments?

It makes sense to concentrate on children because children are the most vulnerable to environmentally-related illness, and suffer disproportionately as a result. A response tailored to the specific needs of children, rather than a 'one size fits all' type solution will make the greatest difference to the lives of children.

Focusing on the environment ensures a preventative approach that addresses the broader determinants of health. Providing for healthy environments for children is a key strategy for attaining sustainable development. For example, a healthy home environment promotes a young child's health, which in turn impacts on the health and development of the future adult and his/her ability to lead a healthy and productive life.

7. How does HECA relate to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)?

HECA's aims respond to the goals set out in the UN Millennium Declaration, including the goal to reduce child mortality (Goal 4), and to ensure environmental sustainability (Goal 7). Thus, the Alliance will be instrumental in achieving the target to "reduce by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015 the under-five mortality rate". HECA will contribute to these and other relevant goals and targets of the MDGs by helping to combat malaria and other diseases, by improving the lives of slum dwellers, by improving access to safe water, and sanitation, along with improved energy use.

With regards to PRSPs, evidence indicates that health is central to economic growth and poverty reduction objectives—in this context, efforts are being made to increase the attention PRSPs give to creating and maintaining healthy environments for children, considering the significant impact this will have on poverty reduction.

8. Who makes up HECA?

HECA is made up of a wide range of stakeholders with an interest in healthy environments for children. Policy-makers and decision-makers, national and local governments, mayors, schools, NGOs, civil society groups, health/social workers, the

private sector and others play key roles in heightening awareness of the importance of healthy environments for children.

9. Is membership open to everyone?

Membership of the Alliance is open to consideration by any organization that demonstrates a commitment to HECA's mission to end the environmentally-related ill-health and deprivation associated with the places where children live, play, learn and sometimes earn. Criteria for membership are currently being developed.

10. What do members do?

Alliance members contribute through their unique strengths in a number of ways:

- Support the alliance by providing technical, research and development, promotional, advocacy or financial resources to the activities within the alliance at global/regional/country/community levels.
- Mobilize political backing for the alliance in regions, countries, communities, within and between organizations/stakeholders.
- Undertake advocacy with policy/decision-makers so that HEC becomes a priority at global, regional, national and local levels.
- Work with partners at local levels to identify key issues affecting children's health in local environments, and plan and implement priority actions to address these, within the HECA framework.
- Encourage and support community participation in local, regional and national planning and movements for children's environmental health in countries.
- Bring the force of what they are already doing to synergize the efforts of the Alliance.

11. What is the main orientation of HECA (research, action, policy)?

A principal goal of HECA is to inform and influence policy concerning the effective measures that can be taken to protect and promote children's health, through advocacy and information sharing.

HECA will also support action in countries, initially through pilot projects in a limited number of countries, and on a broader scale, by assisting governments and sectors to build national and local capacities in creating and maintaining healthy environments for children.

To assess the effectiveness of existing tools and intervention strategies, action-oriented research may be a significant complement to the goals listed above.

12. What are the key settings addressed by the Alliance?

The Alliance will focus on, and catalyse action within, the home, the school, and the community environments. Particular attention will be given to improving the home environment—traditionally neglected—but where children spend a major part of their young lives, and where the most significant health threats converge.

13. What are the key risk factors addressed by the Alliance?

In each of these settings, HECA will address in an integrated way the priority risk factors, which include water (quantity and quality); sanitation and hygiene; indoor air pollution (e.g., through solid fuel use and passive smoking); insect vectors of disease (e.g. malaria); unsafe use of chemicals (e.g., pesticides, lead); and unintentional injuries (accidents).

14. What are the main activities of HECA?

The alliance will play a key role in providing a clearinghouse of information, knowledge and expertise. HECA's advocacy activities will inform policy and decision-makers at different levels of the effective measures that can be taken to protect and promote children's health, and galvanise the political will, mobilize resources, stimulate efforts to scale up effective actions to address risks in the environments where children spend their time.

An essential element in the work of the alliance will be country and community level support. Members of the Alliance will work together to encourage a groundswell of action through many sectors (including health, environment, education, housing, agriculture, energy, water, local government and social protection sectors). Alliance partners will work together to facilitate the initiation of national and local movements, assisting countries and sectors to build national and local capacities in creating and maintaining healthy environments for children. Pilot projects will be used as the basis for developing healthy environments for children programmes/projects and to demonstrate different ways in which risks to children's health can be addressed.

15. How does HECA work?

HECA will promote sound policies based on solid evidence. It will advocate for the most effective and efficient intervention strategies to ensure a streamlined, coordinated implementation effort to address environmental health threats and safeguard healthy environments for children.

HECA will catalyse action within the settings where children live. It will focus first and foremost on the child and the child's environment, such as the home, the school or the community.

HECA will work in an integrated fashion that bridges sectors at all levels—global to local. It will operate both through collective action and through the coordinated activities of individual members.

The alliance will work according to the principle of subsidiarity. For example, when supporting capacity building initiatives at the local-level, HECA will operate using the expertise of its partners in the relevant community, including local authorities and NGOs.

16. How is HECA supported (funded)?

HECA is supported by a variety of donors and institutions, either directly, or indirectly, via support to the activities of individual alliance members. In-kind contributions from alliance members are a significant source of support. HECA welcomes contributions from governments, foundations, the private-sector, and other entities interested in making children's environments healthier.

17. How can we assess the results of HECA?

Monitoring results and evaluating the effectiveness of HECA's activities are integral to the alliance. Agreed upon indicators will be developed along with a framework for monitoring change. HECA will use these tools to disseminate in a clear and transparent fashion the results of its work, which will be published regularly in hardcopy reports or posted at www.who.int/heca.

18. Who bears the risks and who accepts the rewards for the success of HECA?

All alliance members share responsibility for HECA's achievements. While a multi-institutional task force and secretariat are supporting and facilitating the initial development of the alliance, and different organizations are demonstrating leadership in their areas of expertise, ultimately it is the individual members of HECA who are accountable for the results and deliverables of this initiative. As a true alliance, rewards and risks must be shared by all members.

19. How can I get involved in HECA?

Please visit HECA's website www.who.int/heca for information and membership criteria and contact the HECA secretariat at heca@who.int. Alternatively, you may find it useful to get in touch with individual members of HECA (listed on the website), who are working in your area of interest.

20. What progress can be expected of HECA in three years time?

In three years, HECA will be moving forward in full-force as a mature Alliance according to defined priorities and comprehensive plan of action—with sufficient resources mobilized, with the roles and responsibilities of its members defined, and with action coordinated so that the Alliance is poised to make a real difference to children living in unhealthy environments around the world.

By this time, HECA will have accomplished a primary goal of raising the profile of Healthy Environments for Children so that it is higher on the political agenda and a priority for many Governments. National and Local Movements will have been mobilized in a significant number of countries.

The Alliance will have expanded access to effective tools for action, and through needs assessments, workshops and information sharing, supported capacity development at the country and community level. By responding to the evidence and

action-oriented research, HECA will have facilitated the development and implementation of effective programmes and policies.