

Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on NTDs (STAG)

Terms of Reference

Functions

STAG is the principal advisory group to the World Health Organization (WHO) for the control of NTDs. STAG has the mandate of advising WHO on overall global policies and strategies, ranging from epidemiology, monitoring implementation, research development to delivery of interventions and their linkages with other health interventions.

STAG will specifically advise the Director-General of WHO on the:

1. Adequacy of progress towards the achievement of the goals of the Global plan to combat NTDs;
2. Major issues and challenges to be addressed with respect to achieving the goals of the Global Plan;
3. WHO's response to current public health priorities with regard to NTDs;
4. Major general policies, goals and targets related to NTDs;
5. Adequacy of WHO's strategic plan and priority NTDs control activities to achieve the goals consistent with its mandate and considering the comparative advantages and the respective roles of partner organizations;
6. Inter-sectoral activities and initiatives related to the control of NTDs and strategies and linkages with other health interventions;
7. WHO's relations with partnerships in the control of NTD;
8. Role of WHO in promoting integration of NTD interventions in national health systems.

Membership

STAG shall comprise 15-20 members, who shall serve in their personal capacity and represent a broad range of areas of knowledge covering NTDs control activities.

STAG members shall be acknowledged experts from around the world in the fields of epidemiology, public health, infectious diseases, parasitology, management, delivery, health-care administration, health economics, and drug safety.

The membership of STAG shall seek to reflect a representation of:

- (1) professional affiliation (i.e. academia, medical profession, research institutes, and governmental bodies including national programmes, public health departments and regulatory authorities);
- (2) major areas of interest (e.g. NTD control, vector management, parasitic diseases, epidemiology, research, drug delivery and safety); and
- (3) the four major strategic areas of WHO's work relating to NTDs control (i.e. increasing coverage, accelerating innovation, ensuring quality and safety, and integrating with other health interventions).

STAG members, including the Chairperson, shall be recommended to the Director, NTD by an external selection panel for approval and appointment by the Director-General of WHO in consultation with WHO Regional Offices and other relevant WHO departments. Notwithstanding the foregoing, all new STAG nominations as well as renewals and discontinuation of appointments to STAG will be approved by the WHO Director-General. Consideration will be given to ensuring appropriate geographic representation and gender balance.

STAG members, including the Chairperson, shall be appointed to serve for an initial term of two years. Such two-year term may only be renewed once.

Prior to being appointed as members and prior to renewal of term, nominees and current STAG members shall be required to complete a WHO declaration of interest.

In addition, STAG nominees shall be required to sign confidentiality agreements prior to confirmation by WHO of their appointment as STAG members. All papers presented to STAG, which may include pre-publication copies of research reports, or documents of commercial significance, shall be treated as confidential.

STAG deliberations are confidential and may not be publicly disclosed by STAG members.

A register of members' interests and signed confidentiality agreements shall be maintained by WHO.

Membership in STAG may be terminated for any of the following reasons:

- (1) failure to attend two consecutive STAG meetings;
- (2) change in affiliation resulting in a conflict of interest; and
- (3) a lack of professionalism involving, for example, a breach of confidentiality.

Roles and responsibilities of STAG members

STAG members have a responsibility to provide WHO with high quality, well considered, advice and recommendations on matters described in the terms of reference of the STAG. Members play a critical role in ensuring the reputation of STAG as an internationally-recognized advisory group in the field of control of NTDs. They will be committed to the development and improvement of public health policies.

In addition to the advice received from STAG, WHO may solicit focused technical input from other expert/advisory scientific groups.

STAG has no executive function. Its role is purely to provide advice and recommendations to the Director-General of WHO as outlined in its terms of reference. This may however also include providing advice and recommendations on urgent matters as may be required.

STAG members may individually, or as a group be approached by non-WHO sources for their views, comments and statements on particular matters of public health concern related to their work on the STAG. Such enquiries shall be referred to WHO/NTD.

Meetings and operational procedures

STAG will normally meet once a year. The frequency of meetings may, however, be adjusted as may be necessary. Decisions or recommendations will, as a rule, be taken by consensus.

WHO may also invite representatives from WHO regional technical advisory groups, other UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGO), international professional organizations, technical agencies, donor organizations, manufacturers of essential NTD drugs and other relevant partners as observers to STAG meetings.

Additional experts may be invited to STAG meetings as may be deemed appropriate to further contribute to specific agenda items.

STAG will work with WHO to develop its priorities of work and meeting agendas through an agenda setting sub-group. This sub-group shall comprise the chairperson and two additional members identified jointly by the Chair and the secretariat.

STAG will be kept informed by WHO and partner agencies of progress in the implementation of strategies and the attainment of objectives at country and regional level. STAG will also be informed of policies and recommendations set by the WHO regional technical advisory groups. WHO, with advice from STAG, will determine what policy issues and information from other WHO technical advisory/steering groups should be brought to the attention of STAG.

STAG may appoint sub-working groups to follow up and liaise with the WHO secretariat on specific work items and/or recommendations that will subsequently be submitted to STAG for consideration. The function of such sub-working groups will be time-limited. The chairperson, in consultation with WHO, will identify the need for such sub-working groups and designate STAG members to serve on them. WHO staff will be identified as lead staff to work with the chair of such sub-working groups and to recruit additional members and additional experts as appropriate. Sub-working groups shall determine the most efficient manner for accomplishing their work.

In addition to attending STAG meetings, STAG members will be expected throughout the year, and as may be necessary, to participate in sub-working groups, video and telephone conferences as well as interactions via email and review of documents.

STAG members will not be remunerated for their participation in STAG, however, costs such as travel expenses will be compensated by WHO in accordance with the WHO rules.

STAG members may be requested to participate as observers in other important WHO departmental or cross-departmental meetings.

STAG reports to the Director-General of WHO or his/her designee(s). The chairperson will debrief the Director-General or his/her designee, and Director, NTD, following each STAG meeting. Minutes of STAG meetings will be taken and circulated among members. The recommendations/conclusions of STAG meetings shall be published, with the prior approval of WHO, in the Weekly Epidemiological Record, and posted on the NTD Departmental website within two months of each STAG meeting.