1. **Background:**
A number of World Health Organization (WHO) Member States have expressed concern about the status of drinking-water regulation. They consider the use of regulations as they relate to drinking-water are an essential instrument in protecting health and achieving the drinking-water and sanitation target of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), both in developed and developing countries. It is critically important that the management of water supplies and the capacity to respond to possible events of drinking water contamination and of waterborne illness be improved. For governments, regulatory frameworks are powerful tools with a significant potential to support processes aimed at achieving these MDG targets and the associated public health outcomes.

Regulations that make up such frameworks are, however, not always used to their full potential. Specific challenges identified by national drinking-water and sanitation professionals and by drinking-water regulators in developing and developed countries include the following:

- often, regulations have been developed from an engineering and operational perspective, and may neglect the health perspective, providing inadequate support to authorities for public health surveillance and associated responses;
- there may be a lack of clarity regarding legal mandates, authorities, roles and responsibilities, caused by gaps and overlaps in the framework; and
- a regulatory framework may be completely absent, and where it does exist if may be incomplete and/or outdated, and capacity to enforce regulations may be insufficient.

2. **Goals**
The International Network of Drinking-Water Regulators (RegNet) was established in response to requests from WHO Member States to share and discuss strategies to address these issues in an international forum. RegNet aims to promote best practice to regulate a variety of water quality and water management issues.

**Goals:** To, by 2015, increase WHO Member States’ awareness of the primary importance of ensuring that preventing waterborne disease and protecting and promoting public health, as it relates to drinking water, and ensure this awareness is reflected in their regulatory frameworks.

**Mission statement:** To protect public health, as it relates to drinking-water, through the promotion of regulatory excellence and the continual improvement of regulatory systems.
3. **Objectives**

This network's objectives are as follows:

- to **advocate** for the improvement of regulations in order to better protect public health as it relates to drinking-water;

- to support the development of **internationally recognized guidance** on the use of regulations to protect public health as it relates to drinking water;

- to provide **support and guidance to regulators** wishing to establish, update or amend their regulatory frameworks, e.g. how to implement Water Safety Plans within a water safety framework, as recommended by WHO, including case studies and lessons learned

- to provide a **forum** for regulators to share experiences, approaches to addressing specific challenges and share good practices, both in face to face meetings and through an on-line virtual forum; and

- to include the **regulatory perspective in achieving the WHO’s other Water, Sanitation and Hygiene objectives**, e.g. the rolling revision of the WHO *Guidelines on Drinking-water Quality* and other normative publications.

4. **Scope**

The scope of RegNet’s activities encompasses the protection of public health as it relates to drinking-water. This includes the quality, quantity, accessibility, affordability, sustainability, and reliability of drinking-water supply. The scope includes the identification of and response to potential waterborne illness events.

The scope of RegNet activities will also encompass the implementation of regulations. This includes how to optimize the structure and function of governments and institutions to prevent or to mitigate the undermining and/or weakening of regulations by internal or external influences.

RegNet’s scope does not currently include wastewater, sanitation, or personal hygiene practices, such as hand-washing. Nor does the scope include bottled water, as international standards for bottled drinking water are already being addressed through the *Codex Alimentarius*. However, once RegNet has achieved substantive progress with respect to drinking-water, it may consider widening its scope through collaboration with relevant bodies. For example, RegNet may support the development of guidance on how to interpret and apply the *Codex Alimentarius* within regulations.

7. **Secretariat**

WHO acts as host of this network and coordinates network activities. WHO may take a lead in one or more activities (like any other members) or it may be a partner or a facilitator for activities initiated by one or more other members.

6. **Membership**

RegNet is open to drinking-water regulators. For the purpose of RegNet, a drinking-water regulator is defined as a professional tasked with ensuring the safety of drinking-water
production and quality through setting and/or enforcing appropriate regulations and standards and/or independent surveillance at national and sub-national levels.

Organizations should select a maximum of two or three individuals to be RegNet members, who will act as liaisons between the Network and their organizations. Members participate as representatives of their organizations.

To ensure a balance in membership composition, ideally, a maximum of two to three individuals should be selected from each country.

Members leaving their position with the organization they are representing, they should inform the WHO secretariat in a timely manner, and identify and brief a replacement to assume their role.

Other individuals or organizations with specific expertise and experience in drinking-water oversight and other relevant areas may be invited to join the Network as temporary advisors, on an as needed and case-by-case basis, based on their activities and ability to contribute on a technical/project basis.

Interested parties will apply to WHO for membership, who will confirm their roles and application. Members will then be invited to join RegNet’s virtual forum and considered to attend RegNet meetings.

WHO will also undertake targeted identification of potential members, to ensure a diverse and engaged Network.

7. **Operations**

In order to give regulators a space to discuss and share important issues and to decide the best way forward in particular situations in the interests of public health, there is significant attention to confidentiality. While information, questions and concerns may be shared with WHO staff members and select members of other WHO Networks and the Guidelines on Drinking-Water Quality Committee for consideration or incorporation into future guidance and supporting materials, detailed, country-specific information will not be released publicly without the express consent of the member concerned.

**Work plan:**

- RegNet members will propose a work plan of activities, under the defined Network objectives, for the coming year(s), at face-to-face meetings.
- Any RegNet member may propose a project or issue for inclusion in the work plan.
- Work plan activities are agreed upon, based on a majority consensus by Network members, and recommended to WHO for final decision.
- Should an issue arise that needs a rapid response from RegNet to protect public health, activities may be added to the work plan.
- Working groups may be formed to coordinate work on specific issues, with a lead and with members selected from among the RegNet members.
- Experts may be invited to join the Network or a working group, as needed, and based on their activities and ability to contribute on a technical/project basis.
• Unless specific resources are identified, activities will be undertaken by RegNet members on a voluntary basis. Proposed activities, therefore, need to be balanced with available time and capacity of members.

Virtual Forum:
• WHO will host and maintain a virtual forum for the Network, providing a secure electronic work space for members to share information and discuss issues. The virtual forum enables Members to post announcements, create libraries of information, and initiate or participate in discussions. The virtual forum will also act as a repository for documentation and meeting materials.
• The virtual forum will be accessible to RegNet members and requires registration and a password, to ensure a secure workspace.
• In order to ensure Network members have a confidential space to share and discuss issues, network members are asked to identify any confidential issues or materials, and to use discretion when sharing outside of the network.

Meetings:
• The Network will endeavor to host face-to-face meetings approximately once a year.
• These meetings will be held, where possible, in conjunction with other meetings or events (such as the Stockholm World Water Week or other WHO meetings in Geneva) to minimize travel and other costs.
• Future face-to-face meetings will be designed around themes of interest to RegNet members.
• It is recognized that, as the Network expands, additional meetings may be planned on a regional/thematic focus staggered with global meetings.

Network support:
In order to be sustainable, RegNet requires support in order to meet its objectives. The types of support that can be provided include but are not limited to:

• Modest but regular contributions to support general activities of RegNet;
• Hosting and/or co-hosting future meetings of the Network;
• Contributions to support specific activities; and/or
• Expert advice, guidance and contributions.

Network evaluation:
• Suggestions, proposals and feedback will be solicited from Network members periodically by WHO on the priorities, operations and organization of RegNet.
• A systematic evaluation will be periodically undertaken by a third-party.