WHO Action Framework to Advance Universal Access to Quality and Safe Blood

Key messages

- The availability of safe blood and blood products is essential for the provision of numerous routine health care interventions and crucial in emergency situations.
- Access to safe blood for all who need transfusion is essential to achieve universal health coverage.
- Low- and middle-income countries face challenges in making a safe and sustainable supply of blood available for their populations.
- Over 40% of blood donations globally are collected in high-income countries, home to only 16% of the world’s population.
- WHO is addressing these challenges with a new Action Framework to fully support countries set up an efficient national blood system.
- The WHO Action Framework will be launched in September 2019.

Background

Blood transfusion is an essential component of health care. The availability of a safe blood supply is life-saving in situations of severe trauma; when complications arise during pregnancy or childbirth; to treat children with severe anemia often resulting from malaria or malnutrition; and during many complex medical and surgical procedures or treatments for cancer. Regular transfusions are needed to treat conditions such as thalassemia and sickle cell disease, and specific blood products are essential to people with hemophilia.

Similarly, Plasma Derived Medicinal Products are critical in the prevention and treatment of serious conditions associated with a wide range of inherited and acquired medical disorders and diseases. For these compelling reasons, the availability and timely access to quality, safe and effective blood and blood components is important to establish and sustain in all countries.

Barriers to access

Evidence from the WHO Global Database on Blood Safety and Availability points to a number of inadequacies in many blood systems: gaps in policy, governance and financing; insufficient availability of blood for transfusion and plasma derived products; deficiencies in control measures to assure blood and
blood components quality and safety; sub-optimal clinical practices; and absence of effective surveillance. As a result of these inadequacies:

- Only 24% of blood is collected in low- and middle-income countries that comprise 48% of the global population.
- In low- and middle-income countries, the prevalence of transfusion-transmissible infections, such as HIV, Hepatitis B and Syphilis, is considerably higher than in high-income countries.
- During humanitarian emergencies, availability and safety of blood transfusion is a major concern, as demand for blood and blood components increases and delivery often proves to be challenging.

**Strategic action to increase access**

In response to calls for action\(^1\), WHO has provided guidelines, physical standards, training and technical support to improve blood product quality, safety and availability in countries. Despite these actions, progress in blood regulation and availability has been slow in many parts of the world.

For that reason, the *WHO Action Framework to Advance Universal Access to Quality and Safe Blood and Blood Components for Transfusion and Plasma Derived Medicinal Products 2019-2023*, proposes a renewed effort to scale up programme implementation and improve both access to blood and assuring its safety and quality.

The Action Framework provides strategic direction to WHO’s work for the next five years. It aims to identify the main challenges inhibiting access to quality and safe blood and blood components. To effectively address the challenges identified, the Action Framework will subsequently identify strategic objectives related to national policy and governance mechanisms; safe and sufficient blood supply; appropriate clinical use of blood; the regulation of blood and blood products; surveillance and data management; and strengthened partnerships and collaboration.

The Action Framework will improve coordination and collaboration at all levels of the Organization. The document will promote and strengthen new and existing partnerships, as areas for collaborative action are clearly identified. Moreover, it will demonstrate the need for support to WHO (including sustainable funding). As a result, the Action Framework will allow WHO to more effectively carry out its mandate on blood, and to increase impact in countries.

**Call to action: Public consultation**

The development of the WHO Action Framework is a collaborative effort, including all levels of WHO and a wide range of experts. To that end, the Draft Framework will be launched for public consultation after the World Blood Donor Day. This will allow WHO to capture perspectives from policy makers, practitioners and other relevant actors across the globe, to ensure the final Framework reflects what action needs to be taken to achieve universal access to quality and safe blood. The final WHO Action Framework will be launched in September 2019.

\(^1\) WHA 63.12 (2010) and WHA 67.20 (2014)