Prequalification of in vitro diagnostics: an alternative performance evaluation mechanism

The aim of the WHO Prequalification of In Vitro Diagnostics (IVDs) is to promote and facilitate access to safe, appropriate and affordable IVDs of acceptable quality. Priority IVDs are identified based on their suitability for use in resource-limited settings. Products submitted for prequalification are subjected to a comprehensive, standardized assessment to determine if WHO prequalification requirements are met. The assessment comprises three components:

• review of a product dossier;
• evaluation of performance and operational characteristics; and
• manufacturing site(s) inspection.

WHO prequalification outcomes provide an independent technical assessment of the safety, quality and performance of IVDs to other United Nations (UN) agencies as well as to WHO Member States and other interested organizations, to guide their procurement of IVDs.

The WHO Prequalification performance evaluation: the current process

The performance evaluation is essential for independently verifying the performance of IVDs submitted for prequalification. The process also allows WHO to verify aspects that are considered essential for use in resource-limited settings. The dataset obtained complements the verification and validation data submitted by the manufacturer in the product dossier.

The performance evaluation currently takes place in a WHO Collaborating Centre (CC) and/or a site otherwise designated by WHO, depending on the type of assay(s) and on the requirements of the evaluation, in particular the specimen matrix needs of the IVD. Adding to the streamlining efforts undertaken since 2014, the performance evaluation process has been reviewed and a new approach to provide data for the same objective has been designed.

Future WHO Prequalification performance evaluations

WHO will be phasing out the current system for independent performance evaluations. While it will remain a requirement for prequalification, the manufacturer will henceforth be free to choose one of two performance evaluations pathways. Both options constitute a change to the current process.
Option 1: Performance evaluation coordinated by WHO at an earlier stage of the prequalification process

Manufacturers will indicate in the pre-submission form their desire to undergo a performance evaluation coordinated by WHO and performed by an evaluating laboratory designated and selected by WHO from a list of WHO Prequalification Evaluating Laboratories. Instead of the current process in which the evaluation is commissioned after product dossier acceptance, the performance evaluation will be scheduled as soon as the product is designated as meeting WHO prioritization criteria. The performance evaluation itself will remain the same. It is expected that adopting this change will result in shorter timelines to the prequalification decision.

Option 2: Performance evaluation commissioned by the manufacturer and carried out at a Prequalification Evaluating Laboratory listed by WHO

Manufacturers may opt to conduct independent performance evaluation at a laboratory selected by the manufacturer from a list of Prequalification Evaluating Laboratories after the application has been prioritized. The manufacturer will bear the cost of the evaluation and be responsible for coordinating it directly with the laboratory.

If option 2 is selected, it is crucial to understand that the main aim of the evaluation remains the submission of independently generated data required for the WHO prequalification assessment, in addition to the manufacturer’s own data. The selected evaluating laboratory will inform WHO Prequalification Team - Diagnostics as soon as an evaluation has been commissioned by a manufacturer. The site will be required to conduct the evaluation and share the results of the evaluation directly with WHO.

Both options will require the evaluation to be carried out in accordance with a publically available WHO protocol developed in collaboration with international experts.

The prequalification process will otherwise continue to be initiated by a completed pre-submission form from the manufacturer. A revised version of the pre-submission form will contain information on the option selected by the manufacturer for the performance evaluation. If the product meets prequalification prioritization criteria and option 1 is requested, the manufacturer will receive a prioritization letter defining the type of assessment that the product will have to undergo (either an abbreviated or a full assessment; for more details on the process follow this link). If option 2 is selected, the manufacturer will receive a prioritization letter defining the type of assessment as well as instructions on how the data generated from the performance evaluation need to be submitted.
WHO Prequalification Evaluating Laboratories

The performance evaluations will be conducted by a laboratory previously assessed as suitable by WHO. Two separate lists of WHO Prequalification Evaluating Laboratories will exist. List 1 will include laboratories that will work directly with WHO and will participate in option 1. List 2 will be more extensive and will include additional laboratories that will not be included in List 1.

WHO will issue an invitation to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) for laboratories to indicate their interest in being listed for WHO Prequalification performance evaluations as part of either List 1 only, List 2 only or both. The invitation and accompanying documents will contain a list of criteria and requirements that will need to be met in order for laboratories to be considered. Criteria for selection of laboratories will be based on international best practice, in particular on ISO standards ISO 17025:2005 General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories, ISO 15189:2012 Medical laboratories -- Requirements for quality and competence or equivalent. Laboratories will be audited by WHO in order to verify compliance with WHO requirements.
Consultation

On January 27th 2016, a consultation on the alternative performance evaluations pathway for prequalification of in vitro diagnostics was held at WHO headquarters in Geneva. The meeting was attended by all current WHO evaluating sites, donors and relevant partners. The proposed new pathway was presented to the group. Consensus was reached around the new pathway. It was agreed that the process will be piloted during 2016.

The meeting notes can be consulted here.

Implementation timelines

The new approach will follow a phased implementation through 2016. A pilot is expected to take place in 2016. Progressively, the scope of products undergoing this approach will be expanded.