WHO R&D Blueprint

novel Coronavirus

COVID-19 Social Science working group

February 2020

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Powering research
to prevent epidemics

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Background

The COVID-19 Research Roadmap social science working group was established following the Global Research and Innovation meeting held in Geneva 11-12 February 2020. In preparation for this meeting, a working social science research agenda was set out following rapid review of published and pre-published literature, also expert consultation and feedback from operational partners, national public health, regional country offices, technical leads.

The COVID-19 social science research agenda aims to (1) generate high-quality social science evidence for achieving the goals of national strategic public health response plans; (2) develop and employ strong methodologies, and theoretical frameworks to tackle current epidemic challenges; and (3) understand (non-intended) consequences of epidemic-control decisions. Priority thematic areas were also identified.

The social science research agenda aligns what is known about the epidemiology, clinical features of Covid-19, impact and anticipated impacts of the epidemic. As new knowledge is generated, so this agenda may change. We expect new priorities to emerge during the course of the pandemic and also that priorities will differ and need closer specification at regional, national and local levels.

Scope

To facilitate the effective delivery of the social science research agenda for Covid-19 as set out in the Covid-19 Research Roadmap.

Group composition

The working group aims to ensure representation among its members. Group members bring expertise from across global regions and diversity across social science disciplinary approaches. The group includes members with specific expertise in priority thematic areas and with cross cutting expertise. Group membership may change during the course of the epidemic in the event that new priority areas become known and new expertise is needed.

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Roles and responsibilities

Chairs:

Dr. Nina Gobat (University of Oxford, GOARN Research) and Prof. Emily Chan (Chinese University of Hong Kong).

The chairs have the following responsibilities:

- Moderate group activities and discussions to ensure all diverse perspectives are represented.
- To liaise with the WHO focal point and other technical areas as needed.
- Ensure ongoing review and (re-) prioritization of research agenda based on emerging needs and Covid-19 dynamics.
- Promote cross-cutting engagement with other thematic areas and with end-user groups.

Expert group members

The expert group members have the following responsibilities:

- Feedback on "state of the art" Covid-19 evidence,
- Call attention to emerging priority areas
- Responds to requests for evidence and expert guidance to inform response operations via the WHO focal point.
- Conduct tasks and develop materials related to delivery or facilitation of the social science research agenda.
- Share tools, protocols, and (where appropriate) methodological expertise and research outcomes
- Contribute to building networks of social scientists in an effort to ensure global representation for Covid-19.

WHO focal point

The WHO focal points have the following responsibilities:

- Liaison between Research Roadmap social science working group, WHO and RCCE operational group.
- Brings WHO technical expertise and enables cross-cutting activities across technical areas in WHO Health Emergencies program.
- Establishes mechanisms for efficient sharing of tools, protocols, and (when appropriate) results.

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- Builds and expands the network of social science researchers to ensure global representation.

GOARN-Research focal point

GOARN has a network of over 250 partners with multidisciplinary expertise, including social science that aims to deliver research and response. GOARN Research aims to support non-product research in support of the WHO research roadmap.

The GOARN-Research focal point has the following responsibilities:

- Liaison between the Research Roadmap social science working group, WHO and GOARN network partners, including external operational partners, academic institutions and the wider GOARN-Research (GOARN-R) group.
- Identifies external operational partner and other "end-user" research needs to focus and inform on-going review of the research agenda.
- Share updates on the work of the Research Roadmap social science working group, including via the GOARN Knowledge Platform to inform partners of the progress and Covid-19 situation reports where relevant.

Communication

- Fortnightly teleconferences: Wednesday 14:00 – 15:00 pm (Geneva)
- Communication within WHO, including with technical pillars – WHO focal point
- Communication with WHO, GOARN partners and GOARN-R focal point
- Strong communication between WHO and GOARN-R focal point and chairs to ensure coordination and effective group management.

Duration

The working group will convene for the duration of the outbreak. Closure of the working group will be announced, acknowledging contributions and roles.