

Managing Official Relations with the World Health Organization (WHO): Update, Auckland 2012

1. **Document prepared by:** Lucie Binder, Cochrane Operations Unit, and Lisa Bero, San Francisco Branch of the US Cochrane Center; on behalf of the WHO Partnership Committee: Lisa Bero, Lucie Binder, Paul Garner, Jeremy Grimshaw, Harriet MacLehose, Denise Thomson and Elizabeth Waters.
2. **Date:** 28th August 2012.
3. **Purpose:**
 - I. To provide an update on Cochrane-WHO collaborative activities managed under Official Relations.
 - II. To request that the spending period for the budget approved for the management of Official Relations be extended (note that no additional funding is being requested at this time).
 - III. To recommend that support for Official Relations be considered in any assessment of human resources at the COU following the appointment of a new CEO.
4. **Urgency:** Low.
5. **Access:** Open.
6. **Background:** In January 2011, the Collaboration was accepted as a Non-Governmental Organization in Official Relations with the World Health Organization (WHO), the public health arm of the United Nations, establishing formalised communication between our two organisations. This partnership includes a seat for the Collaboration on the World Health Assembly (WHA), the WHO's decision-making body, allowing the Collaboration to provide input on WHO health resolutions. It also provides the opportunity to influence the way research evidence is created and used by the WHO by improving the collection of reliable health information on which its bases its policies.

To support the management of Official Relations, a WHO Partnership Committee was established and a budget of £32,500 GBP approved by the Steering Group to December 2013, to cover the costs of sending representatives to key WHO meetings, including the WHA, and administrative costs such as teleconferences.

In July 2012, WHO approved the Collaboration's workplan for 2013 and the joint workplan to the end of 2015.

7. Activity update (updates since Paris update, April 2012):

I. **Attendance of Lisa Bero and Elizabeth Waters at the 2012 WHA, Geneva**

Via the Cochrane email lists and CCIInfo, the Partnership Committee requested the input of Cochrane contributors in developing the comments ('interventions') on WHA agenda items. Two interventions were presented at the WHA and also published on cochrane.org: on nutrition and "WHO's response, and role as the health cluster lead, in meeting the growing demands of health in humanitarian emergencies".

Lisa and Liz reported that the agenda of this year's assembly was dominated by internal political reform at the WHO, which made occasions for discussing health topics more limited than normal. However, their attendance provided unique opportunities for networking and advocacy. For example, at one meeting, updates to the *WHO Handbook for Guideline Development* were finalised and it now includes references to Cochrane Reviews and systematic reviews generally following advice from Lisa; and at the WHO Guidelines Committee meeting, the Collaboration has been invited to submit its estimation of the costs of preparing systematic reviews.

Lisa and Liz's assessment of attending the WHA is that it remains a worthwhile investment for the Collaboration to fund representatives to attend. It provides the opportunity to put a 'face' to the Collaboration and to break through some of the bureaucratic complexity at WHO, which can limit the efficacy of email and other virtual communication.

We plan to increase the Collaboration's impact at WHAs by consulting more closely with Cochrane Review Groups (CRGs) and review authors in preparing interventions on the formal agenda items; and potentially providing the opportunity for early career researchers and authors to attend in person as part of larger delegations, with the aim of increasing advocacy for systematic reviews in guidelines and policy development.

II. **Comment on the .health (dot health) domain name on behalf of WHO**

The application period for new internet top level domains was recently concluded by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), the body overseeing the internet. The goal is to add hundreds of names to the internet top level (e.g. .com, .au).

WHO notified the Collaboration in August of its concern that the current applications for new top level domains related to health (and including ".health") show insufficient consideration of public health and requested that the Collaboration submit a public comment to ICANN as one input to the evaluation process, in its capacity as an NGO in official relations with WHO. We approved this request and a comment submitted in August on behalf of the Collaboration.

III. **Contribution to the WHO Essential Medicines Model Lists**

The WHO Essential Medicines Model Lists, for both adults (EML) and children (EMLc), will be updated in March 2013. Essential medicines are those that satisfy the priority health care needs of a population and are selected with regard to disease prevalence, evidence on efficacy and safety, and comparative cost-effectiveness. Many governmental and nongovernmental organizations have adopted the essential medicines concept and base their medicine supply system mainly on the WHO Model Lists.¹

In preparation, WHO is seeking systematic reviews to support additions or deletions of medicines to the lists. As of late August 2012, we are seeking the input of CRGs as it compiles a list of relevant reviews and associated review groups. The WHO Essential Medicines department has limited funding to commission reviews and we will be looking at the possibility of seeking this funding to inform the updating of the model lists.

IV. **Invitations for Cochrane contributors to attend regional meetings**

We are continuing to publicise opportunities for Cochrane contributors to attend regional WHO meetings (e.g. the Western Pacific regional committee meeting) as representatives of the Collaboration. We hope that uptake improves as part of our plans to improve the networks between WHO, the Collaboration, and individual review authors. Attendance at these meetings is not funded from the Collaboration's WHO budget.

V. **2010-12 review of Official Relations with WHO**

We recently submitted a report on WHO-Cochrane collaborative activity during the period 2010-12. This report is scheduled for review by the WHO Executive Board at its 132nd session, expected to be convened in January 2013. The 2013 workplan has been approved internally at WHO. The report and workplan is available to download from [cochrane.org](http://www.cochrane.org), here: <http://www.cochrane.org/about-us/relations-world-health-organization>.

8. Activity plans:

We regard the potential provided by Official Relations to influence the way research evidence is created and used by the WHO as the most important one for Collaboration. A key way we hope to maximise this potential is by increasing opportunities for review authors and CRGs to influence guidelines and policy development at WHO, and working towards ensuring that the topics of our reviews are framed and aligned to decisions that are being made by WHO. Our plans include:

¹ http://www.who.int/medicines/services/essmedicines_def/en/index.html

- I. The alignment of regional WHO contacts with the institutions now part of the *Cochrane Initiative to Build Global Capacity in Systematic Reviews* (previously the 'Cochrane Academy'). We also want to work closely with the Initiative co-ordinators over the coming months to increase connections between the Initiative and WHO.
- II. New staff members at the WHO Guideline Review Committee, particularly Dr. Susan Norris (who will be presenting at the Auckland Colloquium), are committed to strengthening the relationship with the Collaboration. A number of meeting to discuss the working of the GRC and how to better integrate the Collaboration have been scheduled for late 2012 – early 2013. Lisa is a member of the GRC and plans to attend on behalf of the Collaboration.
- III. Working with CRGs on the Essential Medicines Model lists (see above).
- IV. Consultation with the Cochrane Editorial Unit.
- V. A special session at the Auckland Colloquium (<http://colloquium.cochrane.org/scientific-programme/short-symposia>), aimed particularly at review authors.
- VI. Further development of the WHO resources on [cochrane.org](http://www.cochrane.org) (<http://www.cochrane.org/about-us/relations-world-health-organization>).
- VII. An update on the 2009 review of collaborative activity between Cochrane contributors and WHO.

9. Recommendations:

- I. We have significantly underspent on the £32,500 GBP budget allocated to manage Official Relations until the end of 2013 – less that £5,000 has been spent in total. We are therefore requesting that the spending period of the budget be extended until the end of 2015, although we are not requesting additional funding at this time. We would like to be able to fund the attendance of at least one Partnership Committee member at the *Cochrane Initiative to Build Global Capacity in Systematic Reviews* planning meeting, and to continue to send delegates to the annual WHA. If needed, we would like the opportunity to come back to the Steering Group to request additional funding, which we envisage might be necessary during or after 2014.
- II. We recognise that opportunities to increase the Collaboration's impact at WHO have been restricted by the limited administrative support and management that the COU has been able to provide over the past twelve months, due to staffing changes there. We are therefore requesting that central support for Official Relations be considered in any assessment of human resources at the COU following the appointment of a new CEO, and in particular, are seeking at least 10% of an administrator's time. Administrative support is currently provided by Lorna McAlley and we would welcome her continued and increased involvement. This is particularly important given the need to update the review of collaborative activities between WHO and the Collaboration within the next few months, and we think it makes sense strategically as the Collaboration seeks to invest in partnership building. Lucie Binder is also providing management and support, and we would also welcome her increased involvement.

10. Impact statement:

Maximising the opportunities provided by Official Relations to influence the way research evidence is created and used by the WHO supports the Collaboration's mission of helping people to make well-informed decisions about health care by preparing, maintaining and promoting the accessibility of systematic reviews. We see particular opportunities for building capacity to conduct systematic reviews in low and middle income countries – and then getting those reviews into guidelines and policy – through links with the *Cochrane Initiative*. We also regard aligning and framing the topics of our reviews to decisions that are being made by WHO as a potentially useful and high impact way of prioritising the development of reviews.

11. Decisions required of the Steering Group:

- I. The Steering Group is asked to consider and give feedback on the contents of this paper.
- II. The Steering Group is asked to approve the recommendations of this paper.