

## Terms of Reference for the Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Disease Elimination (STAG DE)

### 1. Background and Rationale

During its 116-year history, PAHO has played a key role in important hemispheric and world disease elimination achievements, including combatting hookworm and eliminating Africa's *Anopheles gambiae* mosquito from Brazil early in the 1900s, leading the eradication of smallpox and polio from the Americas in the latter part of the 1900s, and supporting countries in the elimination of endemic transmission of the childhood vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, rubella and congenital rubella syndrome. Additionally, through PAHO's technical cooperation, Member States are approaching the regional elimination of malaria and re-elimination of cholera; several neglected infectious diseases such as leprosy, trachoma, lymphatic filariasis and onchocerciasis (river blindness); and zoonoses such as dog-mediated human rabies and foot-and-mouth disease. Elimination of mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV, syphilis, hepatitis B, and Chagas disease is also within reach in the next few years. Yaws appears to be eradicated in the Americas, and schistosomiasis is on the decline. Though PAHO Member States' success stories in communicable disease elimination highlight the large comparative advantage this Region has, we are at a crossroads-- where we can and must finish the task to eliminate these diseases of poverty which are fed by lack of access to health care services, and thus reach the elimination goals set in the SDGs and Resolutions of PAHO and WHO Governing Bodies. In pursuing the elimination of communicable diseases, PAHO expects to prevent disease transmission, save lives, prevent premature deaths, and reduce the burden of illness and disability on all the Region's peoples, leaving no one behind, especially those populations living in conditions of vulnerability. Furthermore, through integrated disease elimination strategies and approaches proposed by PAHO, Member States will build and strengthen technical capacity that will help address other health problems, as well as save resources that can be reinvested to strengthen country health care systems overall.

The Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Disease Elimination (STAG DE) works in a coordinated and complementary manner with other technical advisory groups as needed, including the WHO Strategic and Technical Advisory Group on Neglected Tropical Diseases, and PAHO's Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) on Malaria, Public Health Entomology and Vector Control, Hepatitis Virus, HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis.

## 2. Functions, Duties and Responsibilities

The main function of the STAG DE, as the principal advisory group on topics related to communicable disease elimination and eradication for the Region of the Americas, is to advise the PAHO Director on strategic policies and actions, including optimal pathways of coordination and guidance in the development of a regional agenda for elimination of selected diseases and related conditions.

The STAG DE will also advise the PAHO Director on:

- a. The provision of technical cooperation and coordinating efforts to reduce the burden of communicable diseases and related conditions, including prevention of transmission, morbidity, mortality and disability.
- b. Promotion of disease elimination and related conditions among Member States, as a new and integral element of communicable disease control and management.
- c. Providing Member States with the necessary science-based technical guidance for disease elimination and/or eradication.
- d. Operational research needed for elimination of communicable disease and related conditions based upon identified needs and gaps.
- e. Setting goals, targets, timelines, and measures to support the Organization's Elimination Initiative (EI), including its policy document CE164/16 of 02 May 2019.
- f. Investments needed, risks, and possible synergies in the context of the disease elimination framework and EI business plan, as well as recommendations on policy, technical, scientific, and operational aspects for strengthening communicable disease elimination as an instrument to support prevention, control, and elimination and, in some cases eradication of communicable disease and related conditions in the Americas.
- g. Existing structures for disease elimination and related conditions and identification of additional needs or areas of focus, recommending important disease elimination topics in the Americas (e.g., development or evaluation of new or innovative integrated communicable disease elimination tools and strategies and how they may best be synergized; reaching populations living in vulnerable conditions; etc.), in coordination with PAHO's existing regional disease control and elimination programs and in consideration of the recommendations of other related PAHO/WHO Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs) mentioned in Section 1.
- h. Priority-setting and promotion of technical and operational research on communicable diseases and related conditions to help establish linkages with other on-going public health initiatives, which could support the EI, and on elimination and post-elimination maintenance and innovation, according to priorities set in the Region.
- i. Advise on development of inclusive partnerships and additional stakeholders needed for a successful EI and for implementation of strategic activities that can support scientific

and technological advances for elimination of communicable diseases in the Americas (integration studies, evaluation of new or integrated strategies and innovations).

STAG DE members has a responsibility to provide PAHO with high quality, well-reasoned advice and recommendations on matters described in these terms of reference. STAG DE has no executive function. Its role is purely for advice and recommendations to the PAHO Director. If STAG DE members are approached by non-PAHO sources for their views, comments, and/or statements related to their work on the STAG DE, such inquiries should be referred to PAHO.

PAHO may solicit technical input from other expert or advisory scientific groups.

### **3. Members of the STAG DE**

The STAG DE will have nine to twelve members, who will act in their personal capacity and on a voluntary basis. STAG DE members shall be acknowledged experts in such fields as: epidemiology, control and elimination of communicable diseases and related conditions; immunizations and vaccine-preventable diseases; integrated health systems and service and primary health care; global public health; work with civil society, academia, and community to address equity and vulnerable communities; environmental and social determinants of health; and economic aspects of disease elimination.

To the extent possible, members of this STAG will be selected to ensure an appropriate balance among fields of knowledge, geographic representation, and gender balance. PAHO's Department of Communicable Diseases and Environmental Determinants of Health (CDE) will identify candidates for STAG DE membership in consultation with the Directors of other technical departments, and act as the Secretariat. The CDE Department will submit a list with names of professionals to serve for the initial term to the PAHO Director.

The term of membership is two years, which may be renewed for one term at the discretion of the Director.

The Secretariat will nominate the Chair and Co-Chair from the STAG DE membership for the endorsement of the STAG DE. The Chair and Co-Chair will: chair STAG DE meetings, develop draft meeting agendas in coordination with the Secretariat; oversee, together with PAHO, proper implementation of activities assigned to the STAG DE; and act as liaison with the Secretariat between meetings. The STAG DE Chair, Co-Chair and members may be invited as observers to attend meetings of other areas that have mutual interests or support the prevention, control and elimination of communicable diseases in the Region of the Americas.

Members of the STAG DE shall provide independent opinions, have no conflicts of interest, and serve in their personal capacities only. STAG DE members will be asked to complete and sign the following documents: Declaration of Interests Form (*Annex 1*) and confidentiality agreement (*Annex 2*). This request will be made upon the appointment and extension of appointment of a STAG DE member.

Membership in the STAG may be terminated for any of the following reasons:

- a. Failure to attend two consecutive STAG DE meetings;
- b. Change in affiliation resulting in a conflict of interest; or
- c. A lack of professionalism involving, for example, a breach of confidentiality.

STAG DE members will not be remunerated for their participation in the STAG or for carrying out activities requested by PAHO. However, in accordance with Section 4, below, PAHO will cover travel expenses (tickets and per diem) for each STAG DE member according to the Organization's applicable standards and policies.

#### **4. Meetings/Procedures/Observers**

The STAG DE will meet regularly, every two years. PAHO may convene additional meetings, as needed, including via teleconference and/or videoconference. Members may also be requested to carry out activities between STAG DE meetings, including making arrangements for meetings, reviewing documents, and undertaking requests for analysis and opinions.

Meetings may consist of open and/or closed sessions. Additional experts may be invited to participate in STAG DE meetings for the purpose of providing additional support on specific issues being considered by the STAG DE. Organizations with recognized expertise in the areas of disease elimination, integrated health strategies and other relevant technical areas, and academic or research centers, may also be invited to participate in or attend STAG DE sessions. If invited to attend only, such organizations may only present their opinions upon leave of the STAG DE Chair.

STAG DE meetings have a quorum if 75% of members are present.

PAHO will organize logistical and infrastructure aspects for meetings, pay for travel tickets and per diem of STAG DE members and invited advisors, in accordance with the Organization's applicable standards and policies.

Other invitees shall attend STAG DE meetings at their own expense and will be responsible for making their own travel and lodging arrangements in this regard.

The STAG DE is a PAHO/WHO advisory body and its members, advisors, and invitees are not authorized to speak externally to the public or the press or through social media on behalf of the STAG DE and/or PAHO without specific written permission of the CDE Department Director.

The STAG DE Chair shall submit all reports produced at each STAG DE meeting to the Director of the CDE Department for review and corresponding actions before delivering them to the Director of PAHO/WHO. PAHO owns all intellectual property rights in the content of STAG DE reports.

## **5. Technical and Executive Secretariat**

PAHO, through its CDE Department, is the Secretariat of the STAG DE. The Secretariat will provide all technical, scientific, logistical, infrastructure, and other support necessary for the operation of the STAG DE. Prior to each meeting, the STAG DE Secretariat will provide STAG DE members with the meeting's agenda, all working documents (technical and scientific), and necessary information. Note that distribution of the aforementioned documents and information to external advisors and observers will depend on their nature (confidential or not).