



Consultation on the World Health Organization's engagement with NGOs

This contribution to the consultation is signed by international and national health NGOs with a strong interest in the policies and activities generated through the WHO.

15th October 2012

1. Applying for official recognition

While recognising the importance of ensuring that NGOs are admitted into official relations only if they fully support and assist WHO activities, the procedural aspects can be daunting. The complex form-filling can be a disincentive which, while serving as a filter against casual applications, can disempower legitimate and valuable potential participants, especially those less familiar with WHO language and internal arrangements. If the application and renewal forms are to continue as they presently exist then we recommend that a model version of a completed form is shown, with guidance notes, as an aid to applicants.

2. Avoiding conflicted interests

We concur with many other NGOs in seeking to encourage WHO to distinguish different types of Civil Society Organisation/NGO according to the degree of business interests of the organisation's supporters, funders or governing boards. We are particularly concerned when business-interest NGOs are invited to participate in consultation meetings alongside non-business interest NGOs, as this can significantly hinder the latter to engage with WHO in open and honest dialogue, information exchange and strategy development.

3. Distinguishing business-interest groups

To this end we support proposals for WHO to engage separately with organizations that are linked to commercial interests (e.g. by way of their governing structures, membership, general operations or a high level of dependence on funding from commercial sources). To identify these organizations, the WHO should establish appropriate criteria and NGOs should be consulted to this end. WHO's interactions with these organizations should be governed by the draft policy paper on the private sector that is to be prepared by the Secretariat as well as the existing "Guidelines on working with the private sector to achieve health outcomes".

4. Extending NGO engagement

Lastly, we believe that WHO would benefit from increased engagement with a broader range of NGOs on either a formal or informal basis, including those which represent constituencies that are less often heard, and to encourage member states to extend their consultations with NGOs. The provision of WHO guidelines on this could provide valuable technical support for member states to develop this engagement.

Signed by

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Lobstein', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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on behalf of

IASO – the International Association for the Study of Obesity

IOTF – the International Obesity TaskForce (now located within IASO)

WCRF International – The World Cancer Research Fund

NHF – The National Heart Forum, UK