

**SUBMISSION FROM WHO****Contact: Lesley Onyon, Unit Head, Chemical Safety and Health****[Onyonl@who.int](mailto:Onyonl@who.int)**

1. **Please list and if appropriate briefly describe, your preference for which needs the panel may handle. (If possible, please rank your responses, where 1 indicates your top preference):**

WHO is a specialized agency within the United Nations with the objective of the attainment by all people of the highest possible level of health. Given the sizeable preventable disease burden that can be prevented by addressing environmental risks, the work of the science-policy panel is relevant to many of WHO's responsibilities.

WHO acts as the directing and coordinating authority for health matters and is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters and engaging in partnerships where joint action is needed, shaping the health research agenda and stimulating the generation, translation and dissemination of valuable knowledge, setting norms and standards and promoting their implementation, articulating ethical and evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries, catalyzing change and building sustainable institutional capacity and monitoring and assessing health trends.

WHO is a science and evidence-based organization. The functions of WHO with the greatest potential for overlap with the proposed panel would likely be in the areas of setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy and monitoring and assessing trends.

There are a number of relevant departments in WHO that work on issues relevant to the proposed panel – not only the Department of Environment, Climate and Health (where the units of chemical safety, air pollution, water, sanitation and hygiene, occupational health, radiation and climate change are located), the Departments of Nutrition and Food Safety (and One Health Quadripartite), Health Promotion (Health in all Policies) and also there are considerable interests in the WHO Emergencies Department, the Departments of Family, Women's and Children's Health, Non-communicable Diseases and Mental Health and cross-cutting areas such as the work of the Chief Scientist and Science and Data, Analytics and Impact.

Some of the established chemical safety and environmental health activities of WHO include:

- ***The safety evaluation of additives, contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants*** in food and pesticide residues and harmonizing data requirements.
- ***New and updated technical health-based guidelines on air quality guidelines, water quality guidelines and those relating to chemicals of key public health concern***
- ***WHO's work on air pollution and health which includes a scientific advisory group***
- ***Compiling and verifying country data and metadata on several environmental health-related SDG indicators and in preparing thematic reports, particularly SDG 3.91, 3.92, 3.93, 3.d1, 6.11, 6.21, 7.12, and 11.62***
- ***Chemical safety assessments and development and harmonization of assessment methodologies for health***
- ***Model approaches and targeted country support to identify and implement innovative and effective interventions to address the top 10 chemicals of -public health significance such as lead (Pb), mercury, cadmium and highly hazardous pesticides***

- ***Recommendations, procedures and protocols to establish the scientific basis for the conduct of health surveillance for priority chemicals***

Looking more broadly the work of other Departments is also relevant especially medical products (excluding pharmaceuticals) when product design and innovation are relevant. WHO has existing expert panels and Scientific advisory groups in many of these areas.

Given the potential areas of relevance and overlap of the science-policy panel not only to the work of WHO but other UN organizations, multilateral environment agreements and processes, WHO sees merit in the science-policy panel focusing its work primarily on adding value to work of others, tackling some of the broader questions of how to speed-up implementation of evidence-based solutions at country and regional level; forecasting and horizon scanning, which can be used by all relevant stakeholders.

The GEO Chemicals Outlook report is a good example activity that could be carried out by the science-policy panel. This excellent resource could possibly be strengthened by (i.e., “needs”) broader and formal engagement.

Some criteria may be useful for development by the OEWG for use by the Panel for assessing topics that may be selected for the attention. e.g.:

- If the “need” is aligned with an existing MEA or processes, such as those of WHO, it should be carried out by those bodies e wherever possible.
- If the “need” is aligned with several existing MEAs or processes, then it should be considered for a collaborative effort among those bodies .
- If the “need” cannot be dealt with under existing processes, then it could be assessed as a priority for the science-policy panel.

## **2. Please provide any relevant comments on the needs you have listed above:**

Avoiding duplication of effort and ensuring WHO's standards of quality assurance is paramount, and given the complexity of the landscape, the formulation of very close and effective ongoing working arrangements with WHO is essential, including assessing nominations, prioritising, as well as in the conduct of the assessment.

WHO processes adhere to strict and well established processes particularly with establishing transparency, managing conflict of interest, agreeing the composition and function of guideline development and other expert groups and for dealing with other complexities in guideline development such as the need to incorporate gender, health equity and human rights.

Such procedures will be relevant not only the conduct of any assessment but its acceptability to WHO of any assessment undertaken by the Science Policy Panel when completed. It may be useful to have any processes and procedures assessed by the WHO Quality Assurance Team as there could be aspects that may inadvertently limit WHO's ability to recognize assessments carried out.

WHO's relationship with the Inter Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) a partnership with eight UN international organizations and OECD is also relevant. WHO currently provides the secretariat for this partnership as well as being a member. Biannual meetings help cement a close working relationship and coordinated programme delivery. Additional discussion of the role of IOMC in the science policy panel is another important area to explore to ensure a non-duplicative, coordinated and coherent work programme is developed.

The initial listing and consideration of emerging policy issues under SAICM is a good example of the coordination that may be needed to assess, group and prioritise issues. This was a significant

undertaking of work, at the time of prioritization and grouping of potential emerging policy issues under SAICM which was greatly facilitated by IOMC working collectively to identify relevant ongoing work as well as assisting in the shaping of the issue to be carried forward.

As mentioned earlier WHO has a number of networks which operate in different areas of work. Two of note in the chemicals areas are 1) the WHO Global Chemicals and Health Network and 2) the WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network.

- 1) **The WHO Global Chemicals and Health Network** [Global Chemicals and Health Network \(who.int\)](#) is a forum for discussion among national ministries of health and senior level policymakers about issues related to chemicals and health. Established in 2018, as mandated by the 70<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly, and now comprised of 77 member states, the network links to subregional, regional, and international networks, to facilitate health sector implementation of the WHO Roadmap to enhance health sector engagement in the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management towards the 2020 goal and beyond. The Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly in 2023 requested through resolution (WHA 76.17 [The impact of chemicals, waste and pollution on human health \(who.int\)](#)) for the Director-General to report on any updates needed to the Roadmap to enhance the engagement of the health sector in the new instrument ie the Global Framework on Chemicals . The second in-person meeting of the network is scheduled for February 2024 and potential updates to the Roadmap will be discussed as well as developments in the establishment of the Science-Policy Panel to contribute to the sound management of chemicals, waste and prevent pollution and progress with discussions on an international binding instrument on plastic pollution.
- 2) **The WHO Chemical Risk Assessment Network** ( [Chemical Risk Assessment Network \(who.int\)](#)) is one example of information exchange, focused on scientific and technical exchange, capacity-building, promotion of best practice and harmonized methodologies, and identification of research needs and emerging risks to health from chemicals. The network has 96 participating institutions from 52 member states with additional applications pending. The third in-person meeting of the network will take place 4 December 2023.

**3. Please list, and if appropriate briefly describe, your preference for which questions the panel may handle. (If possible, please rank your responses, where 1 indicates your top preference):**

As mentioned above, the science policy panel could focus on some of the broader questions of how to speed-up implementation of evidence-based solutions at country level.

WHO and UNEP have published a compendium of over 500 interventions in the area of chemicals, wastes or pollution [Compendium of WHO and other UN guidance on health and environment](#)

- Why haven't these interventions been more widely taken up by countries, what are the barriers and gaps that could be addressed to enable implementation?
- What action-oriented research is needed in this respect, namely on the effectiveness of interventions and ultimately fostering policy support for effective and sustainable interventions.

For chemicals of recognized high health and environment costs and concern, e.g. lead, asbestos, cadmium what are the key barriers for protecting health and environment

**4. Please provide any relevant comments on the questions you have listed above: none applicable.**