

Technical Advisory Group (TAG) for Polio Eradication in Afghanistan and Pakistan

Terms of Reference

Functions

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is the principal advisory group for polio eradication for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. TAG is an independent body tasked to advise and make recommendations to each Ministry of Health and GPEI partners on polio eradication programme policies, strategies, and operations. It is convened by the Regional Director WHO/EMR on behalf of EMR Member States and the GPEI partnership.

TAG advises each Ministry of Health and the GPEI partners on interventions needed to achieve the goal of polio eradication. TAG provides recommendations specifically on the:

1. Overall adequacy of progress towards the achievement of the goal of stopping transmission of poliovirus.
2. Addressing major challenges to achieve and sustain high and equitable vaccination coverage, sensitive surveillance and effective social and behavioural change communications at sub-national level and among high-risk populations.
3. Prioritized interventions to ensure adequacy of communications, community engagement and reduction in vaccine hesitancy and increase in vaccine demand.
4. Prioritized interventions to support adequacy of the routine immunization programme for achieving polio eradication; and
5. Prioritized interventions to support integration with other health services.

Regional Director WHO/EMR facilitates and provides oversight on implementation of the recommendations by the TAG.

Meetings and operational procedures

Frequency

TAG meetings will occur at least once per year in person. Additional meetings (in person or virtual) may be convened as needed. Given the fact that Afghanistan and Pakistan constitute one epidemiological bloc, TAG meetings can be conducted jointly or separately for each country.

Content and Agendas

Meetings will focus on the current epidemiological situation and progress made towards polio eradication, as well as responding to specific questions on which the Ministry of Health and partners will seek advice from TAG. Questions pertinent to reaching the goal of polio eradication will be defined in advance of the meeting by the National Emergency Operations Centers (NEOCs) in coordination with the TAG Secretariat (WHO EMRO). TAG may also define additional questions. Once the questions are defined, the TAG will assign a subcommittee consisting of at least two TAG members to work with the country team and TAG Secretariat to review the evidence and develop documents to be presented to the TAG. Pre-TAG technical sessions may be organized by the TAG Secretariat as needed. TAG will also review conclusions and recommendations from national immunization technical advisory group (NITAG) meetings that are relevant to polio eradication.

TAG meeting agendas will be focused and will limit general background or programme update presentations to ensure maximum time for technical and focused discussion and drive towards resolution of identified questions. In advance of the meeting, the NEOCs and the TAG Secretariat will decide on areas for in-depth discussion, in consultation with TAG Co-Chairs, that need focused presentation. The agenda will also include deliberations on cross-border corridors and collaboration.

TAG Meeting Process Overview	
Action	Responsible
1. Define specific questions for TAG	1. Government, with support of in-country GPEI partners and TAG Secretariat
2. Assign TAG members to review evidence on specific areas of concern ahead of the meeting	2. Co-Chairs
3. Define questions needing focused presentations during TAG meeting	3. NEOCs, Co-Chair, and TAG Secretariat
4. Share preliminary conclusions and recommendations with the NEOCs, GPEI partners and Observers before the end of each meeting	4. TAG Co-Chairs and TAG Secretariat
5. Send the final official report to the WHO and UNICEF Regional Directors within 4 weeks of each meeting	5. TAG Co-Chairs and TAG Secretariat
6. Share the report with the Ministry of Health and NEOC within 4 weeks of each meeting	6. TAG Co-Chairs and TAG Secretariat
7. Publish report on the GPEI website once the national governments have received a copy	7. TAG Secretariat

Participants for in-person meetings

Participants in plenary sessions will include representatives from the national governments, GPEI partners, a representative from the national immunization technical advisory group (NITAG), National Certification Commission (NCC) and Observers (e.g. from donor agencies, civil society organizations). Depending on the questions for TAG, regional/provincial levels may also be represented. Additional experts may be invited to participate in meetings, as appropriate, to further contribute to specific agenda items.

Participants in TAG internal deliberations

TAG may invite representatives from the NEOC and implementing GPEI partners for closed meetings.

Participants for additional meetings (in person and virtual)

Participation will be limited compared to the annual in-person meetings and will be determined by NEOCs and TAG Secretariat according to the agendas and questions of the country programmes to the TAG.

Decision-making

TAG reserves the right to make conclusions on progress towards stopping poliovirus transmission, and decisions and recommendations on the questions they are requested to address. Conclusions, decisions, and recommendations by TAG will, as a rule, be taken by consensus. In instances where consensus cannot be reached, final decisions will be taken by the Co-Chairs. Observers and invited experts will not participate in the decision-/recommendation-making process but will be allowed to contribute to the discussions as directed by the TAG Chairperson.

Reporting

To ensure TAG's independent voice, TAG will have a dedicated Rapporteur. The rapporteur may be recruited or identified from outside the country programmes and will be responsible for writing the TAG meeting reports. The TAG Rapporteur, with the support of the TAG Secretariat, will write the conclusions and recommendations of TAG meetings under the direction of the TAG Co-Chairs.

For in-person meetings, TAG will share its preliminary conclusions and recommendations with the NEOCs, GPEI partners and Observers before the end of each meeting. For virtual meetings, conclusions and recommendations will be shared following the meeting after getting feedback from all TAG members. TAG Co-Chairs will send the final official report to the WHO/EMR and UNICEF/ROSA Regional Directors. The WHO/EMR Regional Director will share the report with each Ministry of Health and NEOCs after the TAG meeting. Reports will be published on the GPEI website once the national governments have received a copy.

TAG Secretariat

The TAG Secretariat will reside in the WHO EMRO under the coordination of the WHO Team Leader for Afghanistan and Pakistan and guidance of Director Polio as a representative of the Regional Director, WHO EMRO. The TAG Secretariat will be responsible for keeping the TAG updated on polio eradication activities and progress throughout the year.

TAG Membership

Afghanistan and Pakistan TAG will be comprised of 8-12 independent experts – a common group of at least four global experts shared by both countries along with the inclusion of national experts from Afghanistan and Pakistan as feasible. The Chairperson of the TAG may invite individuals with relevant subject matter expertise to help the TAG address any specific questions.

TAG members will be recruited and selected as renowned and acknowledged experts in applicable fields and national and regional contexts. Membership selection will seek to reflect a representation of:

1. *Professional affiliation*, e.g., academia, medical profession, public health profession, research institutes, and governmental bodies including national immunization advisory groups [e.g. NITAG Chairs], public health departments; and
2. *Major areas of expertise*, e.g., polio eradication, epidemiology/surveillance, virology, immunization/vaccine delivery, public health communications including social media, community engagement and social mobilization, disease modeling, and impact monitoring.

TAG members will be identified through a formal online Call for Nominations process and will be selected by the TAG Secretariat and appointed by the WHO/EMR Regional Director. Prior to being considered for TAG membership, nominees shall be required to complete a WHO Declaration of Interests form. Members will be selected on the basis of their qualifications and ability to contribute to the accomplishment of TAG's objectives. The utmost consideration will be given to ensuring gender balance

Members of TAG shall be appointed to serve for an initial term of two years. The membership will be reviewed after the completion of the term of a TAG member and may be renewed if needed. Decisions for appointment and renewal of term will be taken in consultation with GPEI Strategy Committee and WHO/EMR Regional Director.

TAG members will serve in their personal capacity as experts and should refrain from promoting the policies and views and products of the institution for which they work or may be sponsored by.

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

1. Failure to attend two consecutive TAG meetings.
2. Change in affiliation resulting in a conflict of interest or involvement in activities resulting in a conflict-of-interest incompatible with serving on TAG.
3. A lack of professionalism.

Roles and responsibilities of TAG members

Members of TAG have a responsibility to provide high quality, well-considered advice and recommendations on matters described generally in these Terms of Reference, and specifically on the questions identified by the NEOC and TAG Secretariat. TAG has no executive or management function. Its role is solely to provide advice and recommendations to the Ministry of Health, GPEI and other stakeholders. Members play a critical role in ensuring the reputation of TAG as an internationally recognized advisory group in the field of polio eradication.

TAG members are expected to attend all annual meetings. TAG members are expected to have reviewed relevant background documents provided in advance of meetings to ensure proper preparation and reduce the amount of time used during meeting days on general background presentations.

Active participation will be expected from all TAG members throughout the year, including participation in ad hoc video and telephone conferences as necessary, as well as frequent interactions via e-mail, and field visits as needed. Review of documents may also be solicited. TAG members may be requested to participate as observers in other important WHO or GPEI partner meetings. As a result, TAG members are expected to commit to invest a substantial amount of their time to TAG throughout their tenure.

One of the TAG Co-chairs (or a designated TAG member) will participate in meetings of each country's NITAG.

TAG members will not be remunerated for their participation in TAG; however, reasonable expenses such as travel expenses incurred by attendance at TAG or related meetings will be compensated by WHO.

Call for Nomination /Application for Experts to serve on the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Polio Eradication for Afghanistan and Pakistan

Background

The Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is the principal advisory group for polio eradication for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. TAG is an independent body tasked to advise and make recommendations to each Ministry of Health and GPEI partners on polio eradication programme policies, strategies, and operations. It is convened by the Regional Director WHO/EMR on behalf of EMR Member States and the GPEI partnership.

TAG advises each Ministry of Health and GPEI partners on interventions needed to achieve the goal of polio eradication, specifically on the:

1. Overall adequacy of progress towards the achievement of the goal of stopping transmission of poliovirus.
2. Addressing major challenges to achieve and sustain high and equitable vaccination coverage, sensitive surveillance and effective social and behavioural change communications at sub-national level and among high-risk populations.
3. Prioritized interventions to ensure adequacy of communications, community engagement and reduction in vaccine hesitancy and increase in vaccine demand.
4. Prioritized interventions to support adequacy of the routine immunization programme for achieving polio eradication; and
5. Prioritized interventions to support integration with other health services.

In-person TAG meetings are convened at least once a year. Additional meetings (in person or virtual) may be convened as needed.

Selection and rotation of Memberships and Chair/Co-Chair

Members of TAG shall be appointed to serve for an initial term of two years. Each membership will be reviewed after the completion of the term, which may be renewed if needed. Decisions for appointment and renewal of a term are taken in consultation with Director POL, EMR, before appointment by the WHO/EMR Regional Director.

Co-Chairs of the TAG will be selected from among the members of the TAG. Applicants and nominees are welcome to express their willingness to act as Co-chairs in their application, indicating the time that can be dedicated to the cause of eradication. Candidates applying for the Co-Chair should provide an additional succinct one-pager reflecting their interest, skills, and vision for the position.

Expertise needed (one or more of the following):

- Sound technical knowledge on polio eradication initiative.
- IPV and OPV Vaccinology.
- Immunization programme planning/management, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.
- Epidemiology/public health.
- Disease surveillance.
- Virology.
- Public health communications, including social media.
- Community engagement and social mobilization.
- Social and Behavioural sciences in the immunization/vaccines area including anthropology.
- Disease modelling.

Female candidates with the above expertise are encouraged to apply. Proposals for nominations / applications should be sent by email to pakafgtagsecretariat@who.int with a Curriculum Vitae, indication of relevant expertise, and a completed declaration of interest form. Self-nominations are also possible. The deadline for applications is 15 May 2025.

Only complete nominations received by 15 May 2025 will be considered.

Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Secretariat

Terms of Reference

Structure

The TAG Secretariat resides in the WHO EMRO (Amman) under the coordination of the WHO Team Leader for Afghanistan and Pakistan and guidance of Director Polio as a representative of the Regional Director, WHO EMRO.

From within the secretariat, TAG Focal Point(s) will be assigned to coordinate with TAG members, countries, and other GPEI partners.

Members

The TAG Secretariat consists of:

- WHO, AoW Lead Country Operational Support
- CDC, Team Member / AoW Lead Analytics and Risk Assessment, focal point for regional coordination (as feasible)

Roles and Responsibilities

The TAG Secretariat is responsible for:

- Keeping the TAG updated on polio eradication activities and progress throughout the year.
- Coordinating with the countries (Government and in-country partners) on defining specific questions for TAG and sharing with the TAG members at least one month in advance.
- Working with the TAG on identification of subcommittee(s) to review the evidence and develop documents to be presented to the TAG for responding to the questions.
- Working with the TAG subcommittee(s) on developing documents to be presented to the TAG. **The Secretariat will also draw on further resources from within the wider GPEI partnership as pertinent to the questions posed prior to each TAG consultation.**
- Coordinating the organization of the TAG meetings and relevant logistics.
- Identifying and making available an independent Rapporteur, recruited from outside the country programmes, that will be responsible for writing TAG meeting reports.