

**Second Meeting of the WHO Nutrition Guidance Expert Advisory
Group (NUGAG) Subgroup on Policy Actions***Qingdao China, 9 - 13 December 2019*

26 July 2019

SCOPE AND PURPOSE

In response to a call from the 58th World Health Assembly (May 2005), the World Health Organization (WHO) established the Guidelines Review Committee (GRC) in 2007 with the purpose of developing and implementing procedures to ensure that WHO guidelines are developed in ways consistent with internationally recognized best practices, emphasizing the appropriate use of systematically reviewed available evidence. The robust guideline development process being implemented by WHO is described in detail in the *WHO Handbook for guideline development (2014)*.

In accordance with the Organization-wide transformation in strengthening WHO's role in developing evidence-informed public health guidance, the Department of Nutrition for Health and Development (NHD) has strengthened its role and leadership in providing evidence-informed policy and programme guidance to Member States for promoting healthy diets and nutrition throughout the lifecourse, in partnership with relevant internal departments and partners, and guided by the new WHO guideline development process. This normative mandate was reaffirmed through a request from the 63rd World Health Assembly (May 2010) "to strengthen the evidence base on effective and safe nutrition actions to counteract the public health effects of the double burden of malnutrition, and to describe good practices for successful implementation". More recently WHO's commitment to strengthen its normative work was reiterated in the *13th General Programme of Work (2019 – 2023)* as endorsed by the 71st World Health Assembly (May 2018). It states that "Setting norms and standards is a unique function and strength of WHO" and further noted that WHO "will reinforce its science- and evidence-based normative work".

To implement the strengthening of evidence-informed nutrition guidance, NHD established in 2010 the **WHO Nutrition Guidance Expert Advisory Group (NUGAG)** guided by the **WHO Steering Committee for Nutrition Guidelines Development**, which includes representatives from all Departments in WHO with an interest in the provision of recommendations in promoting healthy diets and nutrition. Membership in NUGAG is usually for three to four years and NUGAG includes experts from various WHO Expert Advisory Panels as well as experts from a larger roster including those identified through open calls for experts, taking into consideration a balanced mix of genders, breadth in areas of expertise, and representation from all WHO Regions.

The NUGAG is generally expected to meet twice a year and will provide advice to WHO on the following:

1. The scope of the guidelines and priority questions (in PICO format) that will guide the undertaking of systematic reviews of evidence;

2. The choice and prioritization of important outcomes for decision-making and developing recommendations;
3. The examination and interpretation of the evidence with explicit consideration of the overall balance of risks and benefits;
4. The formulation of recommendations, taking into consideration the quality of evidence generated and compiled as well as diverse values and preferences, balance of benefits and harms, resource implications, priority of the problem, equity and human rights, acceptability and feasibility; and
5. The identification of research gaps.

In 2010 – 2011, the NUGAG consisted of four subgroups: 1) micronutrients; 2) diet and health; 3) nutrition in life course and undernutrition; and 4) monitoring and evaluation. However, due to organizational changes implemented in NHD in January 2012 and in an effort to reduce the administrative burden of managing multiple subgroups, the number of NUGAG subgroups were reduced to two: 1) diet and health; and 2) nutrition actions which was subsequently renamed as the guideline development group (GDG) on various topics related to nutrition actions. In 2018, the NUGAG Subgroup on Policy Actions was also established.

The NUGAG Subgroup on Diet and Health, established in 2010 focusses on updating dietary goals for the prevention of obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Updating of these dietary goals is an important element of WHO's efforts in implementing the NCD agenda, and achieving the 'triple billion' targets, including one billion more people enjoying better health and well-being.

In November 2014, the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) called for action to address all forms of malnutrition, including undernutrition, overweight/obesity and diet-related NCDs, goals that were then taken up by the SDGs in 2015. The 68th World Health Assembly (WHA) in May 2015, endorsed the ICN2 Declaration (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-ml542e.pdf>) and the Framework for Action (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-mm215e.pdf>) and called on Member States to implement the ICN2 commitments through a set of voluntary policy options and strategies identified in the Framework for Action. Implementation of related policy measures for promoting healthy diets and nutrition noted in the ICN2 Framework of Action were also highlighted in a number WHO policy documents endorsed or adopted by WHA, such as the Comprehensive Implementation Plan on Maternal, Infant and Young Child Nutrition (2012), Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs (2013), as well as in the Report of the Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity (2016). These policy measures include fiscal policies, labelling and marketing policies, trade and investment policies, and public food procurement policies among others.

Furthermore, in April 2016, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) declared a UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016-2025) (http://www.who.int/nutrition/GA_decade_action/en/), recognizing the role of nutrition in achieving the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Decade calls for eradicating hunger and preventing all forms of malnutrition worldwide, particularly stunting, wasting, and overweight in children under five years of age; and anaemia in women and children among other micronutrient deficiencies; as well as for reversing the rising trends in overweight and obesity and reducing the burden of diet-related NCDs in all age groups. Therefore, the goal of the Decade is to increase action at the national, regional and global levels in order to achieve commitment of the Rome Declaration adopted at ICN2, through implementing policy options included in the Framework for Action and evidence-informed programme actions.

Most recently, the Political Declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases reaffirmed the importance to “*promote and implement policy, legislative and regulatory measures aiming at minimizing the impact of the main risk factors for non-communicable diseases, and promote healthy diets and lifestyles*” (A/RES/73/2). Developing guidelines on **policy actions** to promote healthy diets and nutrition will, therefore,

contribute greatly to the implementation of these various global commitments and ultimately to the achievement of health- and nutrition-related SDGs.

To provide evidence-informed WHO guidance on effective policy measures to support Member States in developing enabling food environment to promote healthy diets and nutrition, NHD initiated in 2017 the establishment of *the WHO Nutrition Guidance Expert Advisory Group (NUGAG) Subgroup on Policy Actions*, which will work alongside the NUGAG Subgroup on Diet and Health. The first meeting of the NUGAG Subgroup on Policy Actions took place in December 2018, during which the NUGAG Subgroup reviewed and finalized the scope (including PICO questions and priority outcomes) of the systematic reviews which will guide the formulation of the recommendations for the guidelines on nutrition labelling policies, policies to restrict marketing to children, and fiscal and pricing policies.

The Nutrition Policy and Scientific Advice Unit (NPU) serves as the Secretariat of the NUGAG Subgroup on Diet and Health and also now the NUGAG Subgroup on Policy Actions, and will be convening the second meeting of the NUGAG Subgroup on Policy Action in Qingdao, China from 9 to 13 December 2019.

Objectives and expected outcomes

The objectives of the second meeting are to:

1. Review the final systematic reviews and draft the recommendations on nutrition labelling policies, policies to restrict marketing to children, fiscal and pricing policies to promote healthy diets, through:
 - Assessing the certainty of evidence;
 - Determining the strength of respective recommendations, taking into consideration detailed criteria, such as the balance of evidence on benefits and harms, values and preferences, resource implications, priority of the problems, equity and human rights, acceptability and feasibility;
 - Reviewing and identifying implications for future research, taking into account on-going research and any existing controversies; and
 - Reviewing any possible challenges for implementation of the guidelines.
2. Review and finalize, following the processes established in the WHO Handbook for Guideline Development (2014):
 - The scope of the guidelines on school food and nutrition policies;
 - Questions to guide the systematic reviews on school food and nutrition policies using the “population, intervention, comparison and outcome” (PICO) format;
 - Priority outcomes, including effects on health and other issues, related to implementing school food and nutrition policies.

The **expected outcomes** of the second meeting are, therefore, draft recommendations on nutrition labelling policies, policies to restrict marketing to children, fiscal and pricing policies to promote healthy diets; and final and agreed scope, PICO questions, priority outcomes to guide the undertaking of the systematic reviews and subsequently to formulate the recommendations for the guidelines on school food and nutrition policies.