

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and science

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WHO is mandated through the UN system to be the directing and coordinating authority on human health. WHO has 194 Member States that mandate it to provide leadership on matters of public health, and to provide technical assistance to countries on health matters. It has engaged in applications of science to health for over 70 years, for example through the research that enabled successful smallpox eradication. WHO's current technical strategy reorients the organization's role in science to be more forward-looking, with its new strategy (2019-2023) calling on WHO to "anticipate and assess the impact of research and discovery on public health". This will help accelerate progress towards SDG-3 (good health and well being) and the many health-related indicators underpinning the SDGs. To this effect, WHO has established a new division of the Chief Scientist to increase its engagement with science communities around the world. National academies of science and medicine are important potential partners to assist WHO in providing links for discourse between scientific and public health communities. This can include ensuring that the best evidence is used to inform WHO normative work; guidance on research priorities for public health and critical unmet needs for R&D of medical and health products; assisting in scaling of innovations in LMIC in particular; the development of governance frameworks for emerging technologies; and advice on how to prioritize, integrate and regulate digital health solutions for the best public health impact. Academies of science looking to interact more with WHO should contact Dr Swaminathan (swaminathans@who.int).