



Frequently Asked Questions – World Health Organization

22 December 2023

Frequently Asked Questions on global health reforms including the role of the World Health Organization.

What is the World Health Organization?

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the United Nations agency responsible for responding to health emergencies, promoting wellbeing, preventing disease, and expanding access to health care.

The WHO was established in 1948. More information about the WHO can be found here: [WHO | World Health Organization](#).

How is the WHO run?

The WHO is an international organisation made up of 194 countries, referred to as 'Member States'. The Member States elect the Director-General, who leads the organisation in achieving its global health goals. The current Director-General is Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

How does the WHO make decisions?

The WHO primarily makes decisions through the World Health Assembly which is held every year and attended by Member States, including Australia. The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the WHO, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the WHO budget. The World Health Assembly is held in Geneva, Switzerland.

Further information about the WHA can be found here: [World Health Assembly \(who.int\)](#)

How does Australia work with the WHO?

The WHO is an important partner in addressing global health and health security challenges. The WHO plays a core role in providing advice to national governments on public health systems and health emergencies, as well as developing standards to govern global health and improve health outcomes globally and in our region.

Australia is a Member State of the WHO and commenced as one of the Western Pacific regional representatives on the WHO's Executive Board in May 2023.

Through Australia's aid program, Australia partners with WHO to improve health outcomes and health security in the Indo-Pacific region.

How is the WHO funded?

WHO is funded by Member States, United Nations and other intergovernmental organisations, academic institutions, non-government organisations, private sector organisations and philanthropic organisations.

An itemised breakdown of WHO's funding is publicly available on the [WHO Programme Budget web portal](#). The [WHO Programme Budget 2020-21](#) reflects the latest financial figures for a full biennium budget.