UN Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis
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United Nations Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis

Hepatitis is a global health threat targeted for elimination by 2030. The UN Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis is built on the foundation of promoting equitable access to hepatitis prevention, care, and treatment services, particularly advocating for economically disadvantaged, distantly located and socially marginalized populations.

Introduction & Background

In 2015, WHO reported hepatitis B virus (HBV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) caused over 10 million new infections and 300 million chronic infections, leading to 1.3 million deaths annually from liver disease and liver cancer. In response, the United Nations (in the Sustainable Development Goals) called on to the world to combat viral hepatitis. In 2016, WHO released global strategies, endorsed by all Member States of the World Health Assembly, to guide delivery of hepatitis B vaccination, testing and care services to treat hepatitis B and cure hepatitis C infection to reach the goals for hepatitis elimination i.e., 90% reduction in new infections and 65% reduction in deaths by 2030. In 2022, WHO released an updated global strategy to guide Member States' development of hepatitis elimination programs to work towards the ambitious 2030 goal.

Member States have made substantial progress toward hepatitis elimination; however,
major inequities remain in access to hepatitis prevention, testing and treatment. Globally, of the ~ 350 million persons living with hepatitis B or hepatitis C, < 20% are aware of their infection and < 10% have received treatment. The world achieved the interim UN SDG of reducing global hepatitis B prevalence to < 1 % among young children through vaccination; placing many countries on track to achieve the final SDG goal of< 0.1% HBV prevalence by 2030. However, this interim goal has yet to be achieved in the WHO African region. As a result of low vaccination coverage, 1 in 40 African children are infected with HBV, a prevalence almost three-fold greater as compared to global statistics. Model countries scaled up broad access to hepatitis C testing and curative therapies, demonstrating the feasibility of hepatitis C elimination. With awareness of the benefits and feasibility of hepatitis elimination, other countries are in various stages of developing programs for hepatitis C elimination. Assistance from international sources can catalyze nations' efforts to eliminate hepatitis.

Call for Formation of UN Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis

On September 20, 2022, at a UNGA Side Event in New York, representatives from 12 countries pledged their support for high level and diplomatic cooperation to form a UN Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis. With these pledges, these MS will launch a Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis with the goals of building global political will within the UN and advocacy with other organizations to accelerate progress towards the UN SDG of eliminating hepatitis by the year 2030.

The high-level government, diplomatic and academic representatives from multiple countries joined the call (in person and virtually).
Countries Joining the Call for UN Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis on September 20th, 2022

- Brazil
- Chile
- China
- Egypt
- Georgia
- Ghana
- Japan
- Sierra Leone
- Ukraine
- Malaysia
- Mongolia
- Nigeria
- Tanzania
- Portugal

Dr. Harvey Altar – Nobel laureate in Medicine and Physiology, vocalizing his staunch support for the initiative – Sept 20, 2022

Joint call for the formation of Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis – September 20, 2022
Organizations Supporting the Call for UN Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis

1. Africa CDC
2. CDC Nigeria
3. Clinton Health Access Initiative, Inc.
4. GLIDE – UAE
5. Harvard Medical School
6. Hepatitis B Foundation
7. Hepatitis Business Solutions, NY, USA
8. MUHAS (SPARCO)
9. MUHAS Sickle Pan-African Research Consortium (SPARCO)
10. Pharco Pharmaceuticals Egypt
11. The Hepatitis Fund
12. UNICEF New York
13. Vista Health Consulting
14. WHO Geneva
15. WHO New York
16. World Hepatitis Alliance

“Portugal supports the formation of UN Group of Friends to eliminate Hepatitis which we will be proud to join and thank Dr Ward and Dr Harvey Altar for their efforts in this regard.”
Eduardo Ramos – Dep. Permanent Representative of Portugal to the UN – Sept 20, 2022

“When we gather in the village square, and we want to watch the moon, it is not because we can’t see the moon from our own home. It is because it is good to come together. Today it is really good to come together to speak about how to eliminate hepatitis from the world.”
Dr. Ouma Ogwell – Act. Director CDC Africa
Sept 20, 2022
The Egyptian government announced a partnership with the Ghanaian government, in which Egypt provided HCV medicines for persons living with HCV.

“You are indeed a Group of Friends for Hepatitis Elimination, and your friendliness is demonstrated by the fact that you are getting together from different countries across the world, sharing in this dream to eliminate hepatitis.”

Dr. Francis Collins – Science Advisor to the President of the US
Sept 20, 2022
On December 20, 2022, Ambassador Osama Abdelkhalek, the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the UN New York sent out invitations to all Member States, calling on them to join the Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis.

"As we engage in three UN General Assembly health-related high-level meetings in 2023, I believe the formation of this Group can lead to the promotion of our efforts towards attaining the international goal of hepatitis elimination by 2030."

Ambassador Osama Abdelkhalek
Permanent Representative of Egypt to the UN
Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis
Purpose and Objectives

As the world moves from the pandemic response to pandemic recovery, the progress on many hepatitis-related indicators worldwide will need to accelerate substantially (IHME, 2018). The opening of additional channels of dialogue and collaboration at the diplomatic level will seek to open options for the international and in-country support necessary to achieve goals for hepatitis elimination.

The UN Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis will create a forum for Member States to exchange information on progress, innovations and lessons learned with other Member States, organizations within the UN system, technical experts, civil society organizations and with other stakeholders. By raising awareness at the diplomatic level, the UN Group of Friends will bring high-level attention of donor agencies, development banks, philanthropic organizations and national governments, helping low- middle income countries (LMICs) eliminate hepatitis. It would also provide an opportunity for member states to hear from experts, partners, and advocates from all around the world on various aspects of hepatitis as a disease and the burden it forces on health systems globally. By supporting achievement of goals for hepatitis elimination by 2030, the Group of Friends will contribute to averting seven million deaths from hepatitis in LMICs.

The Vision

To create a forum for Member States to exchange information on progress, innovations and lessons learned

To convene UN special events, develop UN resolutions, and calls for action by UN organizations.

To bring high-level attention of donor agencies, development banks, philanthropic organizations, and national governments to eliminate hepatitis
The UN Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis

1. Is open to all Member States (MS) at the Permanent Representative (PR) and Deputy Permanent Representative (DPR) levels and/or their designees.
2. Promotes health diplomacy between MS and other organizations to build national and global capacities in line with the UN Charter Article 57-1 page 12, which entails international cooperation in health and recommending solutions to international health issues.
3. Serves as a platform for Member States to exchange information on events and initiatives at the UN and worldwide, promoting awareness and building support for achieving hepatitis elimination.
4. Is a forum where members can discuss how to achieve equity in the health and economic benefits of hepatitis elimination within the context of the UN 2030 Agenda.
5. Provides opportunities for Member States to hear from relevant experts, partners, and advocates on the various components of hepatitis elimination including, advocacy, care strategies, technologies, and financial options for increasing the feasibility of hepatitis elimination.
6. Promotes integration of hepatitis elimination with other prevention and care services under the paradigm of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

The UN Group of Friends will use World Hepatitis Day and other health observances to synergize and enhance global and national partnerships through special events and meetings at the UN and other appropriate forums on hepatitis elimination.
7. Advocates for leveraging investments for the COVID-19 response toward building capacity to eliminate the endemic threat of hepatitis, highlighting the role of the hepatitis elimination infrastructure in the response to COVID-19 and preparedness for future pandemics.

8. Through resolutions and diplomatic declarations, will promote coordinated efforts and cooperation among Member States and appropriate partners in coordination with WHO and other UN-affiliated organizations.

9. Through strategic dialogue, will strengthen capacities and governance for evidence-based decision making.

Governance of the Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis

Leadership

The UN Group of Friends is chaired by the Permanent Representative of Arab Republic of Egypt, Ambassador Osama Abdelkhalek.

The Mission Team of Egypt, under the leadership of the Permanent Representative

- Proposes priorities for the year
- Represents the Group of Friends at external meetings and promotional opportunities
- Reviews quarterly updates prior to release
- Seeks to engage Member States in joining the UN Group of Friends

Steering Committee

The steering committee will include one Member State representative (Ministry of Health/Ministry of Foreign Affairs/other govt officials) from each region.

1. AFR
2. AMR/PAH
3. EMR
4. SEAR
5. WPR
6. EUR
**Member States**

Member States can

- Take part in key leadership roles in the work consortium that will be developed by the Group of Friends
- Give the input on the matters under discussion
- Participate in external meetings and promotional opportunities

All decisions will be made with mutual consensus, endorsed by the Chair, unanimity will not be required. The approach is in line with the consensus to multilateral decision-making at the UN and is familiar to the sovereign states.

**Observers**

Members of the group can invite observers to the meetings and events. Organizations can request to participate as observers. The Secretariat will set up a process for review and approve requests. The observers at the Group of Friends may comprise of the following as the group grows:

- Multilateral organizations
- Philanthropic organizations
- Non-governmental organizations
- Private sector
- Foundations and Consortiums

1. Observers are expected to have technical expertise and experience in funding, advocacy, technology development or implementation of prevention and care services.
2. The UN Group of Friends will prioritize participation of observers for representation of geographic areas and populations most affected by hepatitis B and hepatitis C and the strategies and as outlined in the WHO global strategy and related documents.
3. Observers can be contacted for input on issues of technical nature, opportunities for health diplomacy and to coordinate advocacy and promotional activities.
4. Observers will have opportunities to comment on and contribute to key discussions except for the final decision making.
The Secretariat

The Secretariat for the group is Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination (CGHE) of the Task Force for Global Health. The secretariat functions are undertaken in coordination with WHO Office at the UN New York.

1) The Secretariat has responsibilities to support the group’s strategic vision and direction to promote collective action. This includes high level ownership and representation in UN Group of Friends structure as well as managerial oversight of group’s operations.

2) The Secretariat will undertake the following administrative tasks:

- Facilitate collaborations among UN Group of Friends MS and others to build capacity and share lessons learned and/or updates on any urgent situations.
- Circulate relevant material to members in good time for preparation for each meeting
- Manage meetings preparation, making necessary coordination, and circulating meeting notes to all partners.
- Draft of meeting agendas in consultation with the Chair.
- Circulate quarterly updates of progress and prepare an annual Secretariat report of progress, impact and activities.
- Oversee and update Group of Friends for Hepatitis Elimination website, social media and communications strategy.
- Create opportunities for Group of Friends to promote hepatitis elimination and to share broadly with media channels

3) Guided by the deliberations of the UN Group of Friends, the Secretariat will coordinate production of advocacy tools and promotional materials for use by Member States and other organizations as appropriate.
Yearly Theme:

The Secretariat will release a theme every year in December and the activities of that year will be centered around it.

2023 – This year’s theme is Solidarity for Hepatitis Elimination. The efforts will be focused on building high-level diplomatic cooperation by bringing in more Member States, building partnerships and strengthening the solidarity to pave the way for elimination of viral hepatitis by 2030.

*The ‘Group of Friends’ offers a promise of democratizing the decision-making processes by ensuring that issues outside of the priorities of dominant (or the most vocal) states may be placed on the agenda and creating a critical mass behind specific causes. For this to be the case, this ‘Group’ mustn’t simply become a space for like-minded Member States to congregate; they must remain outward looking advocates for a more effective and just UN system.*

Online Resources:
Group of Friends to Eliminate Hepatitis webpage: https://www.globalhep.org/un-group-friends-eliminate-hepatitis

Highlights of the 2022 UN Side Event in New York: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_OuJLMHV74

Twitter: @globalhep

Sign up for CGHE monthly newsletter for more updates.

Contact us:

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Glossary

**UN**: United Nations

**LMICs**: Lower Middle-Income Countries

**CGHE**: Coalition for Global Hepatitis Elimination

**TFGH**: Task Force for Global Health

**WHO**: World Health Organization

**MS**: Member State

**PR**: Permanent Representative

**DPR**: Deputy Permanent Representative

**UHC**: Universal Health Coverage

**Hepatitis Virus Targeted for Elimination**: Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) and Hepatitis C Virus (HCV)

**Elimination of Viral Hepatitis by 2030:**

- Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) prevalence among children < 5 years of age - 0.1%

- 90% reduction in new infections by 2030
  - Number of new hepatitis B infections per year - 2 per 100,000
  - Number of new hepatitis C infections per year - 5 per 100,000

- 65% reduction in mortality by 2030
  - Number of HBV-related deaths per year – 4 per 100,000
  - Number of HCV-related deaths per year - 2 per 100,000