TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP ON COVID-19 MORTALITY ASSESSMENT
CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST TO BECOME A MEMBER

Background

The need for timely, reliable and actionable data to improve population health has never been greater. For many years, data and statistics on population and health have been an area of common interest and collaboration between the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). WHO collaborates with the Population Division of UN DESA on mortality estimation and life tables. WHO works with the Statistics Division of UN DESA to promote coordination across national statistical systems, to ensure interoperability of data systems and to foster cooperation between health ministries and national statistical offices.

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for methodological advances in population health measurement, research, critical data quality assessment and global cooperation to obtain reliable information on the impact of the pandemic from multiple data sources linked to COVID-19. In this regard, both UN DESA and WHO are committed to assisting Member States in making the best possible use of all available information by developing and applying statistically rigorous methods to measure mortality due to the pandemic for all appropriate population subgroups, by identifying key data gaps and areas for data system strengthening, and ensuring coordination on such matters across the entities that comprise a national statistical system.

For a full understanding, the assessment of COVID-19 mortality should include deaths directly attributable to COVID-19 as well as those due to the indirect impacts of the pandemic on mortality from other causes of death. Together, these two categories comprise the "excess deaths" attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. This mortality surveillance framework needs to generate the key health intelligence for policy responses to curb the pandemic. It should be informed by the best science, using the most appropriate methods and data available. The global evaluation of excess deaths and related analyses need to benefit from inputs and insights from a wide range of experts from across the globe.

The **Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment** will serve as a broad scientific and strategic platform to facilitate the exchange of knowledge and application of methods on COVID-19 mortality. A primary role of the TAG will be to advise and support efforts by WHO and UNDESA to assist Member States to obtain accurate estimates of numbers of deaths attributable to the direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic.

The membership profile of the Technical Advisory Group will, accordingly, cover a wide range of expertise and skills. TAG members will be leading experts in the analysis of mortality data, in causes of death and COVID-19 mortality statistics and research, with expertise in epidemiology, demography, official statistics and other relevant areas, drawn from international agencies, national statistical offices, academic institutions and elsewhere.

Objectives

1. Critically appraise current approaches to measuring excess mortality attributable to COVID-19 and develop a comprehensive, pragmatic and policy-relevant set of measurement methods to track excess deaths due to COVID-19 in countries, including the certification of COVID-19 deaths.

   The TAG would draw on the experiences of a network of existing and emergent research and pandemic monitoring efforts and mechanisms, seeking to avoid duplication of effort, encourage inclusive global participation and promote the application of the most scientifically rigorous methods and approaches for the identification, analysis and interpretation of "excess deaths", considering the wide variety of national data systems and available resources.

2. Review and offer guidance on methods for estimating the global death toll from COVID-19. The analysis by the TAG would inform the estimation of total mortality for 2020 and 2021 in future editions of *World Population Prospects* and *World Health Statistics*.

Ultimately, the work of the TAG should contribute to:

- Reliable and policy relevant estimates of "excess deaths" (as defined above) at the national, regional and global levels;
- Better understanding of the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19 on total mortality, including effects on the cause of death structure in populations and the implications of the interaction of COVID-19 infection with common major causes of morbidity and mortality for public health policies; and
- Improved coordination in the production of mortality and cause of death statistics within and across national and international statistical systems, consistent with the increased emphasis being given to strengthening civil registration and vital statistics systems being promoted by WHO, the UN and other partners.

Membership

Persons interested in joining the **Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment** are invited to send an expression of interest, along with a brief recent Curriculum Vitae, to DDI@who.int with copy to population@un.org by Monday 30 November 2020. The target size of the TAG is 20-25 members.

Administrative support

The Technical Advisory Group will be supported by a joint WHO and UN DESA secretariat jointly and will use a flexible working model in which smaller sub-groups composed of relevant experts, not limited to members of the core TAG, will be organized to focus on specific topics.

Following the selection of TAG members, it is expected that a first meeting will take place in December 2020 to discuss priority tasks to be addressed over the next six months.

Revised 20 November 2020