# Core Functions of the World Health Organisation

In order to cater for the changing nature of global health, the World Health Organisation has refined its core functions to ensure they are relevant for the coming years.

In their Eleventh General Program of Work (2006-2015), the World Health Organisation commits to carrying out the core functions identified in figure 1:

**Figure 1:** The 6 core values identified by the World Health Organisation.

# Exploring the Core Functions

In the coming section, each of the core values will be explored in greater detail.

## 1. Providing leadership and creating partnerships to improve health.

As the global health body, the World Health Organisation takes much of the responsibility in promoting health globally. As major health issues arise, the WHO works with its member states in order to achieve positive outcomes for those in need. Examples of this include Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria; the Roll Back Malaria Partnership; and the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health. The WHO works to increase the effectiveness of such programs by providing assistance and guidance to those in need. The WHO also works with other international bodies such as the United Nations and the World Bank, to ensure that programs are as effective as possible. Much of this work centres around the effort of trying to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

## 2. Managing information and promoting research

This function centres around research and the role it plays in promoting health. New developments are continually being made with regards to disease prevention and treatment and the management of health systems. The WHO works with other organisations to ensure that the most up to date research is available for improving health for those in need.

## 3. Setting norms and standards

The World Health Organisation works to standardise the way that research is carried out, the terminology and classification systems used. This enables different groups to share resources and data from across the globe with regards to diagnosis, treatment and prevention of disease. If the information is in the same format, technologies and procedures can also be shared among countries. The WHO has devised a number of systems to ensure that these norms are followed across the world, including the International Classification of Diseases.

## 4. Assisting with policy selection

When a health issue is identified, the government of the country concerned works to implement policies to deal with the issue. However, factors such as economy, location and the social environment means that individual countries have individual needs. The WHO has a range of policy options that can be tailored to meet the individual needs of a country. As the WHO has a large wealth of experience in implementing policies around the world, they can assist countries to make appropriate policy choices. Some issues that the WHO has provided policy options for in recent years include those relating to mental health, road traffic accidents, violence against women, chronic diseases, tobacco control, and patient safety.

## 5. Providing technical support and assisting health systems to become sustainable

One of the WHO’s lasting contributions to world health has been by providing technical support to countries. This support does not take the form of implementing strategies, but rather to provide advice that can be used to ensure the government of the country concerned can implement sustainable programs and policies.

The WHO assists countries to monitor disease outbreaks and surveillance of conditions such as malaria and HIV/AIDS.

In emergencies and conflicts, the WHO assists countries in receiving the resources they need by facilitating communication between countries and other organisations.

## 6. Monitoring health trends

The WHO works with the governments of various countries and statistical institutions to collect data concerning trends and health related issues. As a result, countries can be monitored and compared for the purpose of improving health globally.

The WHO assists countries in building up their surveillance capabilities and therefore provides them with early detection systems. This both provides a level of protection against outbreaks of disease and therefore allows governments to have greater control over the health of their people.

## Test Your Knowledge

1. A. List the WHO’s 6 core functions.

b. briefly explain what each core function relates to.

1. Design an acronym or silly sentence that could be used to help you remember the core functions.

## Apply Your Knowledge

1. Read the following case studies about WHO projects and identify the core function evident.

Africa Health Infoway is an ICT-based network of e-health solutions, to support health at districts in 53 African countries. It is planned for implementation over 5 years, delivering connectivity to global information, strengthening the capture, use and exchange of health information.

WHO is coordinating the global response to human cases of H5N1 avian influenza and monitoring the corresponding threat of an influenza pandemic. Information on this page tracks the evolving situation and provides access to both technical guidelines and information useful for the general public

The WHO Global Burden of Disease project draws on a wide range of data sources to quantify global and regional effects of diseases, injuries and risk factors on population health. The latest assessment of GBD for 2004 is available, together with updated projections to the year 2030, and documentation of methods and data sources. Manuals, software and other resources are also provided for carrying out burden of disease studies.

The goal of the Diagnostics and Laboratory Technology team is to promote and facilitate access to safe, reliable and appropriate diagnostic technologies and laboratory services in an equitable manner

The WHO Programme on Health Statistics is an integrated WHO initiative to strengthen country, regional and global health statistics for better policy making and programme implementation. The major interactive components are enhancing country capacity, promoting international harmonization and standardization, and improving the quality of statistics and evidence.

1. Access the WHO website (<http://www.who.int/entity/en/>) and find one program that shows evidence of each of the WHO core functions.