

SESSION 7: SCIENTIFIC INDEPENDENCE FROM POLITICAL INFLUENCE: DILEMMAS, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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Scientific independence from political influence Dilemmas, challenges and solutions



ANNUAL MEETING

APRIL 18-19, 2024 | BUDVA, MONTENEGRO

Agenda

- Introduction
- Group discussions
- Plenary group presentations
- Summary and way forward

Code of Practice for National Public Health Institutes

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CoP: Organisational framework

An NPHI needs to be a clearly defined organisation with a legal framework, organisational structure and professional leadership and ethical values enabling scientific excellence and independence.

- Having a **legal framework** describing tasks, responsibilities, and authorities with public health functions clearly distinguished from other organisations, ensuring predictable mandate and financial conditions, and enabling scientific excellence and independence.
- NPHIs are **public institutions, operating as part of the government** or with the concurrence of the government.
- NPHIs are organised with a clear and distinct mandate to enrich the technical capabilities in the country's public health system and build collaboration with other actors and entities.
- Work of NPHIs is **evidence- and science-based** and should not be subjected to undue political and commercial influence.
- The organisation is flexible so it can quickly adapt to meet short- and long-term challenges through integration and robust planning and coordination among public health functions.



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CoP: Scientific independence

Scientific independence from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators and civil interest groups, ensures the credibility of the NPHIs.

- The **independence of NPHIs from political and other external interference** in developing, producing, and disseminating scientific knowledge is specified in law.
- The NPHIs have responsibility for ensuring that **scientific knowledge** is developed, produced, and disseminated in an independent manner.
- The NPHIs should have the sole responsibility for deciding on scientific **methods, standards, and procedures**, and on the content and timing of releases.
- Scientific releases from NPHIs are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political statements.
- The NPHIs are entitled to comment publicly on public health issues, including criticisms and misuses of knowledge as far as considered suitable.
- The procedures for the **recruitment and appointment** of the heads of the NPHIs are transparent and based on professional criteria only. The reasons on the basis of which the incumbency can be terminated are specified in the legal framework. These cannot include reasons compromising professional or scientific independence.
- The NPHI has **adequate autonomy** to make decisions on administrative and financial issues of the Institute in alignment with accepted rules and regulation of the country.

Dilemmas

- The NPHI is part of government and is dependent on government in areas of organisational structure, mandate, strategy, tasks, and finance to name some.
- At the same time the NPHI wants to have scientific independence. Is it possible?

Challenges

- What are the main challenges your NPHIs have encountered regarding scientific independence in the past few years?
- Give examples.

Solutions

- Present structural and practical measures to mitigate or overcome the dilemmas and challenges.



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Group work facilitators

- Marith Volp, RIVM, the Netherlands
- Claudia Habl, GÖG, Austria
- Anders Tegnell, FoHM, Sweden
- Annika Veimer, TAI, Estonia

- Fernando de Almeida, INSA, Portugal

Dilemmas

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