10 October 2023 In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the international community has taken decisive steps to strengthen global health security. Among these efforts, the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005 stands as a pillar of collaboration and reform.

IHR amendments: a vital initiative

Member States of the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized the need for comprehensive changes to the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005 to enhance their effectiveness. This significant decision was formalized through Executive Board Decision 150(3) in 2022 and the World Health Assembly Decision WHA75(9) in the same year.

The catalyst: lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic

The start of this reform process lies in the lessons drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic. Review panels examined the functioning of the IHR and the global health security architecture. These evaluations highlighted the need for meaningful amendments to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Guiding the transformation: working group on amendments

At the forefront of this transformative journey is the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005. Comprising dedicated representatives from WHO Member States, the Working Group on Amendments to the IHR is entrusted with the huge task of drafting and proposing amendments to the IHR.

Parallel pathways: intergovernmental negotiating body and working group

Simultaneously, another critical process is underway in the form of the Intergovernmental

Negotiating Body (INB). Established by WHO Member States in December 2021, the INB is tasked with crafting a convention, agreement or international instrument, commonly referred to as the Pandemic Accord, to address pandemic preparedness and response comprehensively.

A multi-faceted endeavour

Within the scope of the Working Group on Amendments to the IHR, the 196 States Parties to the IHR, including the 194 WHO Member States, are considering more than 300 proposed amendments to 33 of the 66 articles of the IHR and 5 of its 9 annexes, plus 6 new articles and 2 new annexes.

The path ahead: proposal package to the World Health Assembly

In line with decision WHA75(9), the Working Group on Amendments to the IHR is poised to compile a package of amendments. These proposals will be presented for consideration by the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly in May 2024. This package represents a collective effort to strengthen global health security.

Inclusivity and consensus

The Working Group on Amendments to the IHR operates on the principles of inclusivity and consensus. It welcomes participation from all WHO Member States and conducts its proceedings in alignment with the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly.

The review committee’s role

To facilitate this transformative process, the IHR Review Committee regarding amendments to International Health Regulations 2005 has been established. This expert committee functions in line with WHO Regulations for Expert Advisory Panels and Committees. It provided its report to the WHO Director-General mid-January 2023, with technical recommendations to inform the work of the Working Group on Amendments to the IHR and the broader effort to strengthen global health security.

Global collaboration in action

This journey toward amending the IHR reflects global collaboration at its finest. Member States, committees and working groups are joining forces to create a safer and more resilient world. As we move forward, these collective efforts will play a pivotal role in protecting public health on a global scale.

Article-by-article examination

Additionally, the Working Group on Amendments to the IHR has undertaken an exhaustive article-by-article examination of the proposed amendments. These amendments include deletions, additions and clarifications, all aimed at strengthening the IHR.

The Working Group on Amendments to the IHR 2005 represents a crucial development in strengthening global health security. Through comprehensive amendments and collaborative efforts, the international community is working tirelessly to ensure a safer and healthier future for all.

Related resources

Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations 2005

https://www.who.int/teams/ihr/working-group-on-amendments-to-the-international-health-regulations-%282005%29

Intergovernmental Negotiating Body

https://inb.who.int/

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