

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

World Health Organization: A Fact Sheet

Lois McHugh

Analyst in International Relations

Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division

The World Health Organization (WHO), established in 1948, is the U.N. System's authority on international public health issues. It assists governments in improving national health services and in establishing worldwide standards for foods, chemicals, and biological and pharmaceutical products. WHO concentrates on preventive rather than curative programs, including efforts to eradicate endemic and other widespread diseases, stabilize population growth, improve nutrition, sanitation, and maternal and child care. WHO works through contracts with other agencies and private voluntary organizations.

The United States has been a member of WHO since 1948. As part of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act of 1994-1995, Congress directed the Administration to monitor the activities of the WHO to ensure timely implementation of budget reform measures and the efficient and effective use of resources for reduction of diseases and disabilities in developing countries.¹ The Administration is requesting a contribution of \$107.4 million for FY1997.

Organization. The WHO policy making body is the World Health Assembly, composed of all 190 member states. It meets annually in May to decide the overall direction of the Organization and the general program for a specific period, and to adopt the two year budget. (The 1996-97 budget is \$842.7 million.) Decisions are made by majority vote, except for decisions on the budget that require a two-thirds vote. There is no veto. The Assembly elects the Director General as well as the 32 member states who designate persons to serve on the Executive Board. The Executive Board meets twice a year to review the work of WHO in more detail and prepares issues for consideration by the Assembly. Ten to twelve members are replaced every year. The United States has a member on the Executive Board three out of every four years.

The Director-General is Hiroshi Nakajima of Japan, who was re-elected for a five-year term in 1993. The Agency's headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland, with a Washington office located at 1775 K St. (202-331-9081). Unlike most U.N. organizations, WHO has six regional offices where most WHO programs are

¹ For further information, see United States Participation in the United Nations. Report by the President to the Congress for the year 1994. Department of State Publication 10267. August 1995.

implemented at the direction of members of that region. The Pan American Health Organization (202-861-3198) is the regional office for the Americas.

Major WHO Programs of Interest to Congress.

- **Child Survival Revolution**--began in 1982 by WHO and UNICEF to increase the use of inexpensive medical interventions to save the lives of millions of children in the poorest countries. Activities included using growth charts to recognize malnutrition, oral rehydration treatment for dehydration caused by diarrheal disease, breast feeding of infants, and immunization against common childhood diseases.
- **Expanded Program on Immunization**--began in 1980 to make vaccinations available to all children against the six major childhood diseases: tuberculosis, whooping cough, polio, measles, diphtheria, and tetanus. By 1990, 66 developing countries had reached the goal of immunizing 80% of a nation's children against these diseases.
- **Division of Emerging and Communicable Diseases Surveillance and Control**--began in October 1995 to strengthen national and international response to new, emerging and re-emerging communicable diseases and related health problems, including antibiotic resistance.
- **Disease eradication efforts**--the eradication of small pox by 1979 is considered a major WHO success. Eradication of guineaworm disease has nearly been achieved, and the global effort to eliminate leprosy is in its last stage. Polio has been eradicated in the Americas.

Finances. WHO's budget, maintained on a calendar year cycle, is the largest of the U.N. Specialized Agencies. The U.S. share of 25% is approved by Congress in the State Department authorization and appropriation legislation. For example, the U.S. contribution of \$97.3 million in FY1996 will pay for the 1995 WHO budget. Shortfalls in appropriations will leave the United States in arrears (with unpaid debts) to the WHO of \$19.95 million after the FY1996 payment is made this summer. The United States will also contribute \$47.75 million to the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) for FY1996.

In addition to contributions to the regular WHO budget, the United States contributes on a voluntary basis to special extra-budgetary programs established by the WHO Assembly. These include programs on tropical disease research, many of the programs established to fight diseases, and those responding to humanitarian emergencies, as well as the separately funded Joint U.N. Program on HIV/AIDS. The U.S. contributes to most of these programs through the Foreign Operations appropriations, but some funds come from the Department of Health and Human Services budget.

WHO Budget and U.S. Contributions (in millions of dollars)

Year	Calendar	Regular Budget		Special (voluntary) Programs	
	Total	U. S. Contribution	Total	U.S. Contribution	
1992	\$367.5	\$94.2	\$208.7	\$39.2	
1993	367.5	94.7	228.8	64.7	
1994	411.1	104.3	213.7	45.7	
1995	411.1	97.3 (est)	230.6	36.9	