TERMS OF REFERENCE

WHO Expanding Contraception Options Guideline Development Group (WHO ECO GDG)

Background and Rationale:

A distinctive role of WHO's Department of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research which includes the UNDP-UNFPA-UNICEF-WHO-World Bank Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction (HRP) is to develop and maintain up-to-date, evidence-based guidance on contraceptive safety and use as part of its mandate to support Member States in achieving the highest attainable standard of health for all - including sexual and reproductive health. The evidence-based contraception guidelines include the Medical eligibility criteria for contraceptive use (MEC) and the Selected practice recommendations for contraceptive use (SPR) guidelines. These normative guidelines and their derivative tools have high uptake worldwide, especially in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), as they respond to their policy, program, and service delivery needs. Contraceptive methods included in the WHO MEC and SPR are generally available globally including in LMICs, have well documented evidence on safety, efficacy, and acceptability, have evidence of safety when used in a variety of medical conditions or physiological states, have been approved by a stringent regulatory authority and have been discussed and recommended by the MEC SPR guideline development group.

Notwithstanding, member states and partners have approached WHO for guidance around *'emerging'* contraceptive methods that are not included in the WHO MEC but are already used in limited geographies or methods in the MEC that are being used differently from the SPR recommendations. While these may be approved by local health authorities, they haven't been prequalified by a Stringent Regulatory Authority (SRA) and may not be in the WHO core list of essential medicines (WHO EML). The inclusion of these methods in the contraceptive method mix - if found to be effective, safe, and acceptable - has the potential to expand method choice, encourage research on new methods and on repurposing existing methods, and support scale up of innovations in contraception.

During a scoping meeting in June 2024, the Guideline Development Group - recommended to WHO to develop *WHO Recommendations on Expanding Contraception Options (WHO ECO)*. During the meeting several emerging contraceptives were identified and prioritized based on availability of evidence on efficacy, safety and acceptability, registration and use in at least one member state, and having important implications for public health and expansion of method mix. In line with WHOs commitment to constantly synthesize evidence to inform family planning standards and guidance, the GDG proposed PICO questions (population, intervention, comparator, outcome) to guide the undertaking of systematic reviews for the identified methods that would inform the formulation of recommendations. It was also agreed to convene a GDG meeting to finalise recommendations for the WHO ECO in 2025.

In response to the requests from member states and stakeholders and in line with the requirements established by WHO's Guideline Review Committee, the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) Department / Contraception, Fertility Care and STI research (CFs) Unit will develop evidence-based recommendations on

Expanding Contraception Options (ECO) to guide the inclusion of these emerging contraceptive methods and practices into family planning (FP) programs and facilitate decision making and safe delivery and utilization of these methods. It is anticipated that the final recommendations will be issued at the beginning of 2026.

Purpose

The Guideline Development Group for WHO recommendations on Expanding contraception Options hereafter referred to as **WHO ECO GDG**, is a group of experts' external to the World Health Organization (WHO) whose central task is to oversee the development, the update and maintenance of WHO's evidence-based guidelines in 'emerging' contraception. To this end the WHO ECO GDG will provide scientific advice and guidance to WHO on the technical content, organization, presentation, and dissemination of the WHO Expanding Contraception Options guideline. The WHO ECO GDG is managed by two nominated co-chairs, a methodologist, the evidence secretariat team and a WHO steering group/secretariat. The WHO ECO GDG is in force until the document is completed, published and until the next review.

Role of the WHO ECO GDG

WHO will convene an in-person meeting from 17- 19 June 2025 where role of the WHO ECO GDG will be to:

1. Examine the evidence profiles from the 5 systematic reviews commissioned by the GDG in June 2024 including the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) to establish the efficacy, safety and acceptability of potential methods to be included in the WHO ECO guideline.
2. Using the Evidence to Decision framework, interpret the evidence considering benefits, harms, values and preferences, feasibility, equity, acceptability, resource requirements and other factors, while ensuring clarity and cohesion.
3. Employ a consensus-based approach to formulate recommendations around which methods or alternative contraception uses are to be included in the WHO ECO guideline, the recommended dosing and related practice recommendation issues
4. Highlight implementation considerations for the WHO ECO and propose research gaps around emerging contraceptives methods and uses.
5. Review and approve the final guideline document before submission to the Guideline Review Committee (GRC)
6. Address any outstanding issues from time to time as requested by the secretariat

Membership

The GDG comprises experts with extensive experience in Family planning/ contraception, public Health, Epidemiology, pharmacology, health systems, innovations and technology, health economics, primary Health care, Nursing and midwifery, reproductive endocrinology, policy formulation and strategic planning, costing, guideline development, research, and academia. Additionally, the GDG will have selected members that will provide user perspectives.

Members of the GDG are invited to serve in the guideline development group for the entire duration of the guideline development until completion. Members of the GDG participate in the guideline development process and at meetings as individuals and not as representatives of the institutions or organizations with which they are affiliated. Members of the GDG members will not receive an honorarium for their participation but in the event of a face-to-face meeting, travel costs and per diem will be reimbursed for experts external to WHO, if these are incurred