

# PAHO



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## CONCEPT NOTE

### Malaria Champions, rethinking process - 2022

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This year (2022), the Malaria Champions (MC) Committee has reviewed the initiative to better respond to current and future challenges, taking into account the new Plan of Action for the Elimination of Malaria 2021-2025. The need to promote greater appropriation by the Ministries of Health and other actors in the countries, as well as greater use of the potential of social networks and a need for more permanent actions, among other aspects have motivated this revision.

In this context, the MC Committee organized two consultation sessions (July 2022) that aimed at developing a strategy that takes into consideration the country participants' opinions. National malaria stakeholders, former malaria champions, program officers and collaborators at both international and local levels took part on the sessions. The consultation considered the following ideas to renew the initiative:

#### Greater recognition for more sustained actions

The award, instead of being the final goal of the championship, should be a stimulus to sustain achievements and inspire other practices. This can be achieved through different actions:

- The malaria champions will be motivated to further implement the awarded activities; this may be achieved through successive recognition of the champions for continuing recognized practices. The champions will undertake to present a follow up report around a year after the initial award; this to confirm highlight the sustainability of best practices and the epidemiological achievement. The sustained actions will henceforth be highly valued by the initiative.
- Extending the periods of recognized activities: recognition of longer-term activities would encourage a more consistent implementation of national strategies and longer commitment of local actors, governments and stakeholders in general, to the fight against malaria.
- As references in the fight against malaria, keeping the attention on the champions through incentives as: (1) inviting the champions to participate in the planning of the next championship (2) inviting the champions to 'pass the flame', giving the award to the new champions.

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- The recognitions will be celebrated beyond the Malaria Day in the Americas (DMA), extending the related sensitization throughout the year, through other communication/advocacy channels. This implies, in addition to the distribution of communication materials, the dissemination of information through national and international workshops, technical forums, advocacy sessions, national or regional networks, local and regional journals, scientific societies and congresses, and a more active use of social networks and institutional websites.

## More than one theme and more than one champion

- Several champions (of different types and on different topics) may be awarded simultaneously. The recognition will not necessarily be a competition between entities (municipalities), or similar experiences, but rather a process documenting and recognizing achievements/efforts, with the goal of bringing to light good practices that can be emulated in the region, while, at the same time, stimulating those who face the greatest challenges.
- The MC Initiative will continue to evaluate all entities (countries, provinces, municipalities, etc.) implementing best practices for their recognition. It will also seek to recognize actions by non-governmental actors, in particular communities, civil society, private or public initiatives, projects, research, academic institutions, etc. to highlight their efforts to eliminate malaria, and encourage their pursuit of success.
- The MC Committee will review the models of good practices to be promoted, mainly those that resolve bottlenecks preventing the elimination of malaria in the region (refer to Annex 1 of themes), particularly the barriers to timely access to diagnosis and treatment, self-medication and its possible effects, vector control, social determinants, financing, policies, etc.

## Experiences duly documented by the countries

- The initiative will foster a more active role of the countries in documenting and disseminating the experiences and progresses made by their own programs. Ministries of Health will be invited to provide epidemiological and programmatic evidence of their successful malaria experiences.
- The MC initiative will then become a mechanism to promote quality, analysis and use of information by the malaria programs, while stimulating the documentation and replication of successful experiences in the countries.
- The regional championship will continue to be nourished by the national programs documenting their progresses, as well as through other mechanisms as related to the different themes (Annex 1)
- In addition, the ministries of health in the champions' countries, as well as from other endemic countries, will be invited to participate in the planning of the next championship.
- From the regional level, incentives and technical support will be provided to countries interested in organizing their own national malaria championships, which may be related to achievement of subnational goals set in the National Malaria Plans, or to other achievements, such as those identified through the implementation of subnational verification of Malaria Elimination processes.

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## Next steps – 2023 and beyond

By the end of 2022, in coordination with the Malaria Champions Committee, PAHO will initiate the implementation of the aforementioned changes. The 2023 Malaria Champions Call will be sent during the first quarter; the new champions will be recognized during the celebration of Malaria Day in the Americas 2023, along these new strategy lines. The 2023 Call will include the new elements to encourage the countries in their important role of documenting their candidates' achievements. In the same vein, the 2023 process will start implementation of actions aimed at stimulating sustainability, one of the most important element debated during the rethinking process.

## ANNEX 1.

### About the Champions Themes:

MC would continue to recognize a wide range of efforts from High Burden Municipalities (HBM) with important impact/case reduction, to champions in elimination (countries, municipalities or provinces), countries with strengthened malaria surveillance, binational/south - south collaborations, and intersectoral and community participation.

Other themes have been suggested during the consultation, including innovation (innovative operational models) and Program Management; pharmacovigilance, treatment adherence (for *P. vivax*), social determinant for health, malaria control successes in migrated populations, miners, indigenous population and in people living in difficult to reach areas, or recognition of research institutions for their efforts to provide new tools to fast-track malaria elimination.

At the national level, municipalities may be recognized for having maintained zero malaria cases in many years. Selection criteria will include quality epidemiological surveillance and national commitments (municipalities having kept their malaria elimination efforts with local/national funds). The Initiative may recognize progresses of the HBM on Vector Control (SBCC component to improve the number of persons using the LLINs), on Case Management (number of persons treated in 24 hrs. of the appearance of first malaria symptoms; reduction in the number of self-medicated prior to care seeking, number of persons adhering to treatment guidelines, test positivity rates, etc.), or on any other indicators that may evaluate the municipalities' progression toward malaria elimination.

MC may recognize the countries' progress on malaria-related communication, important to educate the population and to bring about better malaria response and reduction in the number of cases. Educational materials for indigenous population in difficult to reach areas, involving volunteers and community agents in sensitizing the population for the reduction of the malaria burden, would be considered.

Efforts to control *P. vivax* may also be evaluated by the initiative for recognition, and municipalities with no urban malaria for the last 3 years could be selected for championship. Efforts to control malaria in borders (the Guyana Shield, with an opportunity to synchronize activities), integrated intervention (using one structure to target other diseases for elimination, which would be a good approach, as not only malaria affects some of the targeted municipalities; intersectoral actions could give more relevance to the efforts being engaged) should be recognized.

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A different proposal has been brought forward during the consultation. With the different realities in the countries (epidemiological situation, interventions, country key gaps), a prospective approach was set for consideration: based on results of national program evaluations, goals would be set and gaps identified. The MC initiative would recognize the countries' progress toward achieving the set goals. Another broad recommendation was to propose, at the international level, a specific competition area (prioritized matters, defined/set by PAHO) to the countries. The countries would compete to achieve the goals and their successes recognized.

The MC Initiative will continue to evaluate all entities for best practices, and highlight their efforts on all malaria elimination aspects, to encourage the participants (organization, countries, municipalities, etc.), in their quest for good results. The MC Committee will review the models of best practices to be promoted. Once important operational challenges to malaria elimination have been identified, the initiative will be driven toward recognizing practices that solve the bottlenecks that prevent malaria elimination in the region, either related to Case Management (Dx and Tx), Vector Control, Social Determinants, Financing, lack of guidance/policy, etc. The guidelines for the national championship will remain flexible, leaving to the countries, with their different epidemiological settings, the task of selecting relevant themes for recognition, in consultation with the Regional Program.



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