

FIFTH MEETING OF THE MALARIA TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP (MALARIA TAG) PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION (PAHO)

July 12-13, 2021

Summary

The Fifth Meeting of the Malaria Technical Advisory Group (Malaria TAG) was convened virtually on July 12 and 13, 2021 in Washington DC to provide final feedback to the PAHO Regional Malaria Program regarding the Region's Plan of Action for Malaria Elimination 2021-2025 and discuss updates regarding on-going malaria activities and evolving priorities. Participating during the meeting were the eight current members of the TAG, of which three are in the process of being recommended for a second term, while five others will be rotated off for reaching the maximum service length of two consecutive terms. The complete list of participants, including the invited observers, is found in Annex 1.

The meeting included four sessions and featured the following topics: (1) Introductory Session that focused on the rules of procedure and message from Dr. Luis Gerardo Castellanos, Chief, Neglected, Tropical, and Vector Borne Diseases Unit; (2) Forging the future of malaria elimination in the Region for the next five years which was dedicated to the discussions regarding the current malaria situation in the Region and the pre-final draft of the Region's Plan of Action for Malaria Elimination 2021-2025; (3) Moving forward amidst the current pandemic featuring the Progress Report regarding on-going malaria activities; and (4) Closed Session of the Malaria TAG for the consolidation of final recommendations to the Plan of Action for Malaria Elimination 2021-2025. The meeting agenda is found in Annex 2.

The main objective of the meeting was to finalize the consolidation of the Plan of Action 2021-2025. The malaria program did not present new questions or discussion points to the TAG, considering that the 2019 TAG recommendations are still in implementation. The restrictions imposed by the pandemic, as well as financial challenges in 2020 limited the implementation of some actions recommended by the TAG. The presentation of the progress report on the second day facilitated discussions regarding progress in on-going efforts and next actions.

Main Recommendations

Given that the focus of the meeting was on the final review of the Region's Plan of Action for Malaria Elimination 2021-2025, and the Progress Report regarding on-going activities was presented primarily for

information purposes, the main recommendations of the Malaria TAG were focused on the various action lines and components of the action plan and are presented as follows:

1. The process for the development and consolidation of the Region's Plan of Action 2021-2025 followed a comprehensive and detailed consultation process that involved global, regional, country, and local level partners and stakeholders (as graphically presented in Annex 3)
2. The evolving COVID-19 pandemic will likely continue to be an important contextual consideration for health efforts in the Region, including those pertaining to malaria, such that its impact on health systems and economies of countries should be factored into the operational implementation of the Plan of Action.
3. Indicators. The impact indicators in the Plan of Action can benefit from a tabular presentation that clearly reflects the 2015 baseline, status in 2020, and target for 2025. It is important to clarify if the indicator and target for mortality is the reduction in mortality incidence since 2015 given that there is a footnote about case fatality rate that can create confusion. The addition of 75% as the target reduction figure for 2025 in the first impact indicator will clarify alignment with the GTS. Furthermore, the baselines and targets for the indicators corresponding to the objectives of the strategic action lines must be established; and indicators that pertain to the timeliness of reporting and initiation of investigation should be considered.
4. Diagnosis, treatment, vector control. The action plan needs to include actions to address the HRP2 deletion problem, surveillance strategy, and solutions at the regional level for production and improved access to pLDH-based tests. Information on the coverage of vector control actions in high-burden municipalities must be collected and monitored so that current gaps in coverage and quality of primary vector control interventions (i.e., LLIN, IRS) may be determined and understood. It is also suggested not to discourage complementary vector control measures, which could be approaches that can be considered for operational research (or, at a minimum, rigorous monitoring and evaluation) to respond to existing evidence gaps (e.g., larval control, space applications). Technical input from PAHO will be useful to support these operational research or rigorous monitoring and evaluation efforts.
5. Surveillance. In addition to the emphasis on micro-stratification, more proactive strategies and systems should be promoted to monitor other social, economic and political events that can affect malaria transmission dynamics and reintroduction, such as policies with the tourism sector, migration, socio-political events or natural disasters. Attention should be given to the importance of the malaria situation in indigenous communities, pregnant women, and other key target

populations; and concrete actions to address the problem of malaria in pregnancy should be considered. The variations in urban vs. rural malaria must be monitored, as they can potentially vary under the current COVID-19 pandemic and would have corresponding implications in terms of specific interventions. Also, marked variations in the test positivity rate (TPR) between different countries raises questions about the robustness of the testing data (number of examined cases) such that the origin and robustness of the data pertaining to the examined cases must be determined and assessed.

6. Financing and Advocacy. The financing of the malaria response must be a concern in the current context of economic crisis and challenges for the countries. It is important to consider actions to mobilize resources particularly in countries that are not beneficiaries of the Global Fund, including the feasibility of specific projects that include territories of countries with high-burden areas. Emphasis must be given to the need for identifying other sources that include financing for basic malaria supplies. Concurrently, measures to move towards greater autonomy in the Region to produce basic malaria supplies such as production of rapid tests based on pLDH must be considered. Also, while the action plan highlights the importance of regional alliances and initiatives and the support of donors and partners, advocacy must strategically focus on multi-sectoral actions and collaborative approaches that ensure the governance and leadership of the countries and affirm the importance of overall health systems strengthening.
7. Community participation / health services / primary care. Different models of work with the community must be considered under the current context of the pandemic and the resulting financial crisis. Alliances between academia and the public sector must be leveraged to generate the evidence needed for such approaches and establish the steps for their implementation. The importance of essential public health functions as a key platform for actions on malaria should be recognized, including the need to update the analysis and solutions on issues related to malaria program management, information, and surveillance. Specific actions to integrate malaria actions with basic primary care strategies such as the Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) must likewise be pursued.
8. Operational research. The type of topics that are priorities for operational research in malaria should be clarified and explained, rather than simply mentioning operational research as an objective. In particular, the malaria research agenda should also include highly relevant topics in vector control such as: use of new insecticides, resistance, species complexes and the role of different vectors in transmission. While it is considered that there is enough clarity on research

priorities for the Region, particularly in the context of elimination, that would be important to mention in the Plan^{1,2,3}, also it can be mentioned that specific or contextual country program priorities will be regularly updated through systematic consultative review with member countries.

9. The Malaria TAG affirms its support and approval for the Region's Plan of Action for Malaria Elimination 2021-2025 and recommends PAHO to finalize and publish the document after considering the additional Malaria TAG inputs, observations, and suggestions.

Observations / Perspectives Regarding the Progress Report

The TAG recognizes the relevance and usefulness of the report, but additional details and supporting information are deemed necessary particularly for some of the progress and challenges that were highlighted. The inclusion of tables, graphs or analysis of cases with more detailed information on main aspects, such as the situation in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, would be very useful for the TAG to be able to provide additional, more precise inputs.

Radical cure for *P. vivax*

- There is concern regarding the absence of clear policies and strategies in countries implementing radical cure for *P. vivax* malaria, particularly about the introduction of primaquine double dose, tafenoquine, and G6PD testing. It is important to recognize different operational scenarios given that they may require different strategies.
- The status of the systems for monitoring compliance with supervised administration of treatment or adherence of patients to treatment with primaquine was discussed. PAHO reported on the existence of treatment supervision actions in several countries, especially among those with very few cases and countries in Central America, although there is generally an absence of such systems to report the completeness of treatment, which is an area for ongoing attention and improvement. It will also be important to include in the report the improvements to the nominal notification systems under development in some countries (e.g., Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Suriname, and Venezuela)
- The TAG believes that a working group to guide improvements in radical cure policies, integrating donors, institutions that promote innovation, and academia with malaria programs, may be useful

¹ Malaria research agenda paper Draft, PAHO, 2016

² Sesión 11. Malaria research agenda. Malaria TAG Meeting 2019

³ Research agenda update, PPT, 2016

to organize the approach to radical cure more strategically in the Region; and emphasizes the importance of an approach where the existence of different scenarios that require different approaches are recognized. Likewise, ensuring adequate balance in terms of the profile of the people and the character of the institutions involved is key so that operational realities are recognized. It is suggested to include groups with expertise on the issue, to engage local researchers who have established relationships and infrastructure to work with the most affected populations, and to standardize protocols and tools.

High-burden municipalities

- More advocacy elements must be sought and leveraged to strengthen the initiative of high-burden municipalities, in particular the use of advocacy platforms that already exist such as the Malaria Champions. Sustainability of actions and impact must be considered in identifying Champions among this cohort of high burden municipalities or communities.
- The TAG also emphasizes the fact that developing, implementing and evaluating micro plans in high-burden municipalities translate into effective actions and concrete improvements in malaria operations.

MDA

- The slow progress in the actions recommended by the TAG in 2019 to guide the implementation of MDA interventions in the Region and prevent countries from engaging in MDA practices without adequate monitoring and evaluation measures, is an important concern. It is considered necessary to work on a technical framework that facilitates guidance for countries in such interventions that may be relevant to accelerate elimination in some contexts. WHO is convening this year a Guideline Development Group to evaluate the evidence on focal MDA (for elimination) with an eye towards formulation of recommendations that will also help regional decisions.

Research agenda

- The malaria team is encouraged to seek alliances within PAHO-WHO with training initiatives for researchers such as those promoted by TDR.

Annex 1:

Meeting Participants

Malaria TAG

Chair: Dr. Martha Lucia Quiñones

Members:

- Dr. Keith H. Carter
- Dr. Marcelo Ferreira
- Dr. Lyda Elena Osorio
- Dr. Jose Puello
- Dr. Frank Richards
- Dr. Ana Carolina Santelli
- Dr. Larry Slutsker

Observers

- Ms. Maria Veronica Espinosa, Global Fund
- Dr. Marcus Lacerda, Instituto Leônidas & Maria Deane / Fiocruz-Amazônia (participated only on Day 1)
- Ms. Amalhin Shek, USAID

Secretariat / PAHO

- Dr. Luis Gerardo Castellanos
- Dr. Roberto Montoya
- Dr. Maria Paz Ade
- Ms. Janina Chavez
- Dr. Rainier P. Escalada
- Dr. Blanca Escribano
- Dr. Dennis Navarro
- Ms. Alexandra San Jose

- Ms. Anna Serrano
- Dr. Prabhjot Singh

Annex 2: Meeting Agenda

General Objective:

Provide final feedback to the PAHO Regional Malaria Program regarding the Region’s Plan of Action for Malaria Elimination 2021-2025 and discuss updates regarding on-going malaria activities and evolving priorities

Specific Objectives:

- Review and finalize the PAHO Regional Malaria Program regarding the Region’s Plan of Action for Malaria Elimination 2021-2025 based on results of the nationwide consultation process among countries, partners, stakeholders, and within PAHO.
- Review progress of key activities since the fourth Malaria TAG meeting in May 2019, and facilitate discussions among members regarding the way forward particularly amidst the evolving context of the COVID-19 pandemic and other potential future disruptions

Day 1 – July 12 (Monday), 10:00 to 13:00 (EST)

Time	Agenda Item	Participants
10:00 – 10:30	Session 1: Welcome remarks and Introductions	Moderation: Dr. Martha Quiñones TAG Chair
10 min	Rules of Procedure and ZOOM platform	PAHO
10 min	Welcome Message: <i>Dr. Luis Gerardo Castellanos, PAHO</i>	
10 min	Brief Self-introduction of TAG Members, Observers, Secretariat	All
10:30 – 12:00	Session 2: Forging the future of malaria elimination in the Region for the next five years	Moderation: Dr. Martha Quinones, TAG Chair

Time	Agenda Item	Participants
10 min 20 min 1 hr.	Epidemiological situation of malaria in the Region Plan of Action for Malaria Elimination 2021-2025 - Overview Moderated discussion <i>Question: What are the final observations, concerns, and inputs of the Malaria TAG members regarding the new plan of action (particularly in terms of the situation analysis, targets, lines of action, objectives, and indicators)</i>	Dr. Roberto Montoya TAG members, observers, secretariat
12:00 – 12:15	<i>Break</i>	
12:15 – 13:00	Session 2: Forging the future of malaria elimination in the Region for the next five years (cont.)	Moderation: Dr. Martha Quinones, TAG Chair
1 hr.	Moderated discussion <i>Question: What are the final observations, concerns, and inputs of the Malaria TAG members regarding the new plan of action (particularly in terms of the situation analysis, targets, lines of action, objectives, and indicators)</i>	TAG members, observers, secretariat
13:00 pm	Adjournment of Day 1	Dr. Martha Quinones, TAG Chair

Day 2 – July 13 (Tuesday), 10:00 to 13:00 (EST)

Time	Agenda Item	Participants
10:00 – 10:30	Session 2: Forging the future of malaria elimination in the Region for the next five years (cont.)	Moderation: Dr. Martha Quinones, TAG Chair
10 min 20 min	Options Regarding Proposed Impact and Process Indicators / Other Arising Matters regarding the Plan of Action Discussion	Dr. Roberto Montoya TAG members, observers, secretariat
10:30 – 11:45	Session 3: Moving forward amidst the current pandemic	Moderation: Dr. Martha Quinones, TAG Chair

15 min	Progress Report from the PAHO Regional Malaria Program	Dr. Roberto Montoya
1 hour	Moderated Discussion <i>Question: What are the observations, concerns, and inputs of the Malaria TAG members regarding the progress of activities (including ideas for evolving matters that need to be addressed)?</i>	TAG members, observers, secretariat
11:45 – 12:00	<i>Group Photo / Break</i>	
12:00 – 13:00	Session 4: Closed Discussion of the Malaria TAG	
45 min	Final recommendations Plan of Action 2021-2025 Final observations on progress report	TAG members, secretariat
12:50– 13:00	Closure	Dr. Martha Quinones, TAG Chair (TBD), PAHO

Annex 3: Consultation Process for the Plan of Action for Malaria Elimination 2021-2025

