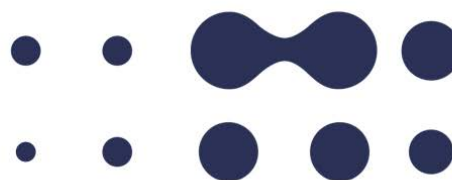


International Agency
for Research on Cancer



**Governing Council
Sixty-eighth Session**

*Lyon, May 2026
Hybrid format*



GC/68/15
14 April 2026

**UPDATE ON THE STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) "COORDINATION
AND COMMUNICATION MECHANISMS BETWEEN
IARC AND WHO – IARC MONOGRAPHS AND HANDBOOKS"**

Context

1. At its 59th Session in May 2017, the Governing Council (GC) of the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) expressed “its support to the Director in his effort to work with senior leadership at the World Health Organization (WHO) to further enhance cooperation” and encouraged “the development of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to optimize communication and coordination in relation to cancer hazard identification and risk assessment” (Resolution [GC/59/R2](#)).
2. At its 70th Session in May 2017, the World Health Assembly (WHA) requested the WHO Director-General (WHO DG) “to enhance the coordination between IARC and other parts of WHO on assessments of hazards and risks, and on the communication of those assessments” (WHA Resolution [WHA 70.12](#)).
3. The IARC Director (IARC DIR) met with the WHO DG in August 2017 to agree on a way forward in relation to cancer hazard identification and risk assessment and prepared a draft IARC-WHO SOP for the *IARC Monographs on the Identification of Carcinogenic Hazards to Humans (IARC Monographs)* and the *IARC Handbooks of Cancer Prevention (IARC Handbooks)*, which was sent to WHO headquarters (WHO/HQ) in November 2017. Between then and May 2018, the SOP was developed through consultation between IARC and WHO/HQ, coordinated by the WHO Deputy Director-General/Programmes, to produce the agreed version for implementation on an interim basis.
4. At its 60th session in May 2018, the GC, having considered [Document GC/60/13 \(Annex 1\)](#) “Coordination and communication mechanisms between IARC and WHO – at management and working level”, endorsed the interim SOP as a basis for implementing coordination between IARC and WHO on assessment of cancer hazards (*IARC Monographs*) and risks (WHO/HQ) and on evaluations of interventions and strategies in reducing the risk of cancer or mortality from cancer (*IARC Handbooks*), recognizing that the SOP, as a living document, will be updated based on further consultation and experience gained in its application ([Resolution GC/60/R7](#)).
5. Following discussions between the IARC DIR and the Scientific Council (SC) and GC Chairpersons in the first half of 2022, it was agreed that the SOP would be updated through 2023-2024 based on the six-year experience gained in its application and on consultation with WHO/HQ. The joint update has been extended until April 2026, thereby postponing its presentation to 2026. The agreed updated draft SOP will be presented at the 68th Session of the GC in May 2026. The updated SOP includes the mechanisms governing communication between IARC and WHO for the *IARC Monographs (Annex 1)* and for the *IARC Handbooks (Annex 2)*.

Introduction: underlying principles

6. IARC and WHO have complementary functions and mandates to advance cancer control globally. IARC was established by mandate of the World Health Assembly Resolution 18.44 (1965)¹. Its mission and governing principles are outlined in its objectives and statutes. In particular, the IARC Statute emphasizes conducting cancer research but does not encompass normative activities, such as developing guidelines, recommendations, or policies. In contrast, WHO’s mandate in cancer prevention and control includes setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries, monitoring and assessing health trends, and providing leadership on global health issues. IARC and WHO

¹ World Health Assembly resolution 18.44.

https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/85780/Official_record143_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

collaboration has been further outlined in 2017 World Health Assembly Resolutions on cancer control (70.12)² and cervical cancer (73.4)³.

7. This SOP aims to restate the distinctions in roles, responsibilities and underlying methodologies for the generation of the different documents of WHO and IARC related to the *IARC Monographs* and the *IARC Handbooks*.

8. At IARC, the Evidence Synthesis and Classification (ESC) Branch is responsible for publication of both the *IARC Monographs* and the *Handbooks*, each being handled by a Programme, namely the *IARC Monographs* (IMO) and the *IARC Handbooks* (IHB) Programmes.

9. The *IARC Monographs* are a series of systematic reviews that identify agents that can cause cancer (hazard identification). These agents may include chemicals, physical and biological agents, complex exposures, occupational circumstances, and other exposures of everyday life. The SOP facilitates coordination and cooperation between IARC and WHO/HQ and/or Regional Offices in their evaluations of cancer hazard and risk for selected agents, respectively. (**Annex 1**).

10. The *IARC Handbooks* provide evidence-based evaluations of interventions and strategies in reducing the risk of cancer incidence or mortality from cancer, through primary prevention or secondary prevention. The interventions include chemopreventive agents, behavioural interventions, policies, and cancer screening and early diagnosis programmes. The SOP facilitates a close cooperation between IARC and WHO/HQ and/or Regional Offices on the development of the *Handbooks* series (**Annex 2**).

11. The SOP maintain clear lines of responsibility for the *IARC Monographs* and the *IARC Handbooks* programmes in line with IARC's governance.

12. The *IARC Monographs* and the *IARC Handbooks* have well-established methodologies as precisely defined in their respective Preambles (see Article 21 of Annex 1 and Article 67 of Annex 2). These procedures are regularly updated as the underlying science evolves. WHO, in analogous manner to IARC, follows precisely defined procedures for conducting **risk assessments** and **guidelines** in the context of its normative and standard-setting work, provided in response to requests for guidance on specific topics from WHO Member States, WHO Offices or other public entities.

Requests to the Governing Council (May 2026)

13. The GC is requested to note the progress made in terms of the collaboration between IARC and WHO to enhance communication and coordination on assessments of carcinogenicity hazards and risks, and on the communication of those assessments.

14. The GC is requested to endorse the SOP as a basis for implementing coordination between IARC and WHO on assessments of hazards (***IARC Monographs on the Identification of Carcinogenic Hazards to Humans, Annex 1***) and risks (WHO/HQ programmes) and evidence-based evaluations of interventions and strategies for cancer prevention (***IARC Handbooks of Cancer Prevention, Annex 2***).

² World Health Assembly resolution 70.12. https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA70/A70_R12-en.pdf

³ World Health Assembly resolution 73.4. https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA73/A73_R2-en.pdf