



**WORLD MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY DELEGATE  
ORIENTATION GUIDE**

**A ROADMAP THROUGH THE POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND  
PURPOSE OF THE WMA GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This booklet was developed to assist Delegates of the World Medical Association General Assembly to understand the processes of WMA and to guide their participation as effective members of the General Assembly. WMA meetings are paperless and all working documents are available into the [WMA website members 'area](#).

## **ROLE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

The General Assembly is composed of all [WMA constituent members](#) (usually referred to as “National Medical Associations (NMAs)”). As a delegate to the WMA General Assembly, you have the privilege and responsibility to take action on behalf of your national medical association on a range of decisions. [WMA Bylaws Chapter IV: General Assembly, Section 2: Responsibilities of the General Assembly](#), outline these responsibilities:

*The General Assembly shall:*

- A) elect a President of the Association pursuant to the provisions of these Bylaws;*
- B) appoint a place and time at which future meetings of the General Assembly shall be held;*
- C) consider and determine applications for membership;*
- D) consider and act upon the annual dues determined by the Council;*
- E) consider the Annual Financial Statement and the Balance Sheet presented by the Council and arrange for such action to be taken thereon as may seem appropriate;*
- F) consider and act upon an estimate of probable income and expenditure (budget) for the next year;*
- G) consider the annual Report of the Council to the General Assembly and motions relating to the adoption of the Report in whole or in part, and arrange for such action to be taken thereon as may seem appropriate;*
- H) instruct the Council concerning initiatives and activities to be undertaken in the pursuit of the objectives of the Association;*
- I) consider proposed declarations, statements and resolutions that have been approved by the Council for transmission to the General Assembly;*
- J) consider and act upon proposals to amend the Bylaws of the World Medical Association, provided that such proposals are in accordance with the requirements of Chapter X –Amendments;*
- K) consider and act upon such other and further business as may properly come before the meeting.*

## **THE AGENDA OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

The agenda and most documents for the General Assembly are prepared several weeks before the meeting and provided to all NMAs so that delegates can study them in advance. The “**Agenda of the General Assembly**” includes a number of action items, such as election of a president, approval of the minutes from the previous General Assembly, and, perhaps most important, consideration of the **Report of the Council to the WMA General Assembly**.

The **Report of the Council to the WMA General Assembly** provides details on all of the work the Council has undertaken since the last Assembly. It is very important to understand that the **action items relating to adopting WMA policy and approving financial documents are contained within the Report of the Council to the WMA General Assembly**. This report includes sections

for Finance and Planning, Medical Ethics, and Socio-Medical Affairs and each section has action items for the Assembly. Being familiar with the structure and content of Report of the Council to the WMA General Assembly is perhaps the most important thing you can do to prepare for the meeting.

The **Report of the Council to the WMA General Assembly** has two pieces. The main report is provided several weeks prior to the Assembly and at the end of the report, you may find the **provisional annex** which lists all of the policy and financial documents approved by the Council at its previous council session in April. However, because the Council also meets immediately before the Assembly, **it may approve new documents at that meeting that are not contained in the provisional annex of the original Report.** Any new documents are listed on the “**Council Report Annex**”, which is provided as soon as the Council finishes its pre-Assembly work. The Annex and the new policy or financial documents are available on the WMA website and also provided in hard copy in the meeting room.

When it is time for the General Assembly to consider the Report of the Council to the General Assembly, and the Annex, the Chair of Council will go through the action items one at a time so that delegates can discuss and vote on each item. Discussion and voting procedures are described below.

## **VOTING IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY: RULES AND PROCESS**

Rules for voting in the General Assembly are described in the [WMA Bylaws, Chapter IV, Section 6. Voting in the General Assembly.](#) Please read and be familiar with the following rules from the Bylaws.

- A) *Each Constituent Member shall be entitled to one vote for each 10,000 physician members, and/or portion thereof, for which that Constituent Member has paid dues to the World Medical Association. The delegate or delegates of each Constituent Member present in the General Assembly will cast all of the votes to which the Constituent Member is entitled under these Bylaws. It shall not be necessary to have a separate delegate present in the General Assembly to cast each vote. However, no vote by proxy shall be permitted on behalf of a Constituent Member not in attendance at the meeting.*
- B) *Unless otherwise required under the Articles of the Association or these Bylaws, any matter before the General Assembly shall be adopted by a simple majority of the votes given thereon.*
- C) *Proposed Declarations, Statements or Resolutions of the Association determined by the Council to be matters of medical ethics shall require for adoption the affirmative vote of 3/4 of the General Assembly delegates present and voting.*
- D) *The adoption of any proposal on an urgent matter shall require the affirmative vote of three quarters of the Assembly delegates present and voting.*
- E) *A motion to vote by secret ballot shall require the affirmative vote of a majority of the Assembly delegates present and voting.*
- F) *The election of the President shall be decided by secret ballot unless there is only one candidate nominated, in which case election may be by acclamation. If there are more than two candidates for any office, no candidate shall be declared elected unless he or she has received a majority of the votes cast. If no candidate has received a majority of the votes cast, then the name of the candidate receiving the smallest number of votes shall be dropped and the remaining candidates shall be voted on again until one receives a majority.*

The process used to manage discussion and voting in all WMA meetings is based on standard parliamentary procedure. While the exact processes used in each organization may vary, most organizations apply some version of these rules to make decisions. The process is described below:

- Any delegate can **make a motion**.
- That motion must be **seconded** by another delegate.
- Once a motion has been seconded, the Chair will invite **discussion**.
- After the discussion is finished, or if there is no discussion, the Chair will ask for delegates to **vote** by raising the cards provided by the Secretariat that indicate the number of votes to which the NMA is entitled. The Chair will begin by asking for a count of those “**For**” the motion, then those “**Against**” the motion and then those who “**Abstain**” from voting.
- The votes will be counted and the Chair will announce whether the motion is **passed** or **defeated**.

For detailed information on the parliamentary procedures of the WMA, please see the [Rules of Procedure for all Deliberative Bodies of the World Medical Association](#), which can be obtained from the WMA website. If you have questions about the process during the meeting, ask the Chair to explain. An **Assembly orientation session**, opened to all WMA representatives, is organised right before the General Assembly session and is dedicated to explain in details the WMA procedures. The WMA values all of its members and wants everyone to understand what is happening so that they are able to vote effectively.

A summary of the Rules of Procedure for all Deliberative bodies is available onto the website: <https://www.wma.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Overview-of-WMA-Parliamentary-Procedures-v1.pdf> in French, Spanish and English.

## **MEDICAL ETHICS AND SOCIO-MEDICAL AFFAIRS POLICY PROCESS**

While the responsibility to **adopt** policy lies with the General Assembly, the responsibility for **development** of WMA policy falls largely to the Council and its Committees, with input from all WMA members. By the time a proposed policy is presented to the General Assembly for adoption, it will have been circulated to NMAs for input (sometimes several times), undergone multiple reviews and revisions by the relevant Committee, and received the approval of the Council. It is important to understand this process so that you can ensure your organization is participating in policy development throughout the year.

The **workflow** for a policy document normally entails the following basic steps:

1. A document is submitted to the Secretariat by a constituent member in one of the three official languages of WMA (French, Spanish or English). The Secretariat evaluates the document, translates it into the other languages, and assigns it to the proper Council committee.
2. The document receives initial consideration by the Committee at its next meeting. In most cases, the Committee will recommend that the document be circulated to NMAs for comments. All NMAs are encouraged to review the document and provide input. By doing so, each WMA member has the opportunity to influence the content of the document.

3. The comments are reviewed and compiled by the Secretariat and a revised document is prepared. (This function may be commissioned by the Chair of Council to a rapporteur or workgroup.) The Committee considers the revised proposal, often making further changes and, when necessary, re-circulating the document for further comments from NMAs. This process often takes between one and three years to complete. Once the Committee agrees that the document is ready, it will submit the proposed policy to the Council with the recommendation that it be approved and forwarded to the General Assembly for adoption.
4. The Council considers the recommendation of the Committee to approve the document. By the time this happens, there has been so much work, consultation, and debate on the paper that it should reflect the majority viewpoint and the Council will approve the document and forward it to the General Assembly with a recommendation that it be adopted. Sometimes, however, the Council decides that further work is required and returns the document to the Committee.

The above description of the WMA policy process is not exhaustive. Most policy proposals are handled in this way, but sometimes the Committee or the Council will decide to take a different approach.



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