

Minutes

Meeting of the Scientific/Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) World Trade Center (WTC) Health Program



February 9, 2023

The World Trade Center (WTC) Health Program Scientific/Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) was convened for its 14th meeting on February 9, 2023, from 11:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., EST. This was a virtual meeting conducted via Zoom. The public was welcome to follow the proceedings via live webcast on the World Wide Web. No registration was required.

Committee Members Present

Dr. Elizabeth Ward (chairperson)

Dr. Sophie Balk

Dr. John Comiskey

Dr. Joanna Gaitens

Ms. Mariama James

Dr. Michael Larrañaga

Dr. Steven Markowitz

Dr. John Meyer

Dr. Debra Milek

Dr. Jason Ostrowe

Quorum was maintained throughout the meeting.

Public Comments

Six persons provided oral public comments via Zoom during the public comment period from 2:15 pm to 2:45 pm, EST. In addition, written public comments were accepted and posted on the Federal eRulemaking Portal: <https://www.regulations.gov>.

Administrator's Opening Remarks

Dr. John Howard, Administrator of the WTC Health Program and Director of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, welcomed the committee and announced the matters to be covered. Pursuant to the Zadroga Act, he asked the Committee to “review and evaluate” the revised *Policy and Procedures for Adding Non-Cancer Health Conditions to the List*

of *WTC-Related Health Conditions*. Specifically, he asked the Committee for advice on two questions:

1. Does the revised language under Section IV.B. of the Policy and Procedures for Adding Non-Cancer Health Conditions to the List of WTC-Related Health Conditions adequately clarify the five weight-of-evidence categories used for grading a causal association by the Science Team?
2. Are the evaluation criteria established for each weight-of-evidence category clearly defined, reasonable, and appropriately linked to an action?

State of the WTC Health Program

CDR Brittany Rizek, Deputy Director of Management of the WTC Health Program, provided an overview of the state of the WTC Health Program. The WTC Health Program recently experienced several transitions in the patient care delivery contracts, including a new contract administrator of the Nationwide Provider Network, and a new pharmacy benefit manager. CDR Rizek's presentation covered the implementation of these two new contracts.

WTC Health Program Research Update

Dr. Travis Kubale, Associate Director for Research Integration of the WTC Health Program, provided an update on the Program's research portfolio and new initiatives that the Program has implemented to disseminate research findings to program members, clinicians, and other stakeholders.

Status of Uterine Cancer Coverage

CDR Hannah Dupont, Chief of the Medical Benefits and Certifications Unit of the WTC Health Program, provided an overview of the status of uterine cancer coverage by the WTC Health Program. Following the STAC recommendation to add uterine cancer to the List of WTC-Related Health Conditions eligible for coverage by the World Trade Center Health Program, the final rule adding all types of uterine cancer including endometrial cancer to the List was published in the *Federal Register* on January 18, 2023. Program members with certified uterine cancer can receive treatment covered by the Program at no out-of-pocket cost on and after January 18, 2023.

Policy and Procedures for Adding Non-Cancer Conditions

Dr. Robert Daniels, Associate Director for Science of the WTC Health Program, presented an overview of the *Policy and Procedures for Adding Non-Cancer Health Conditions to the List of WTC-Related Health Conditions* and described the proposed changes to the Committee. When adding a health condition to the List, the Administrator may take a range of actions as a result of the Science Team’s evaluation of the evidence. In general, such actions depend on the weight of evidence supporting a causal association between the health condition in question and exposures to 9/11 Agents. In preparing their evaluation of the evidence for the Administrator, the Science Team categorizes the weight of evidence pertaining to the non-cancer health condition in one of five evidentiary categories: (1) substantial likelihood, (2) high likelihood, (3) limited likelihood, (4) inadequate likelihood, and (5) no likelihood. The proposed changes to the Non-Cancer Policy & Procedures clarify the weight of evidence categories and thresholds for Administrator actions.

Committee’s Deliberations

Following questions and deliberation, all members present voted in favor of the following recommendations:

1. In the Policy & Procedures for adding non-cancer conditions, with respect to the consideration of health conditions for which a high or limited likelihood of causal association is being assessed, the Science Team consider studies that go beyond peer-reviewed and published epidemiologic studies of 9/11-exposed populations and US Government authoritative scientific publications, to the extent feasible. This is to include peer-reviewed clinical, mechanistic, toxicologic, biomedical, and mental health literature that are relevant to the 9/11 exposures.
2. In IV.B.1.a. revise the highlighted phrase in the first sentence from “*Substantial likelihood of causal association* means that “the scientific evidence demonstrates that a causal association exists” to “the association is strongly supported by peer-reviewed evidence in 9/11-exposed populations” and there is high confidence that the association cannot be explained by chance, bias, confounding, or any other alternative explanation.”
3. The Committee recommends that the Program develop and add to the Policy and Procedures a table that clearly delineates the categories that will be used at various stages of the review process.
4. The Committee endorses the use of five weight-of-evidence categories, and recommends that these five mutually exclusive categories be maintained in all sections of the Policy and Procedures, as appropriate.

Certification Statement

I hereby certify that, to the best of my knowledge and ability, the foregoing executive summary of the February 9, 2023, meeting of the World Trade Center Health Program Scientific/Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) is accurate and complete.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth Ward". The script is cursive and fluid.

Elizabeth Ward, PhD
Chair, STAC