



New Strategies to Promote Iran's Role in EMRO by Supporting WHOCCs

Arman Zargaran^{1,2,3*}

Received: 10 Mar 2026

Accepted: 20 Mar 2026

Published: 31 Mar 2026

*This work has been published under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license.

Copyright© Iran University of Medical Sciences

Cite this article as: Zargaran A. New Strategies to Promote Iran's Role in EMRO by Supporting WHOCCs. *Med J Islam Repub Iran.* 2026 (31 Mar);40:30. <https://doi.org/10.47176/mjiri.40.30>

Introduction

According to the WHO, “a WHO collaborating center is an institution designated by the Director-General of WHO to form part of an international collaborative network set up by WHO in support of its program at the country, intercountry, regional, interregional and global levels (1).” These collaborating centers play a critical role in promoting global health and serve as assistants to the WHO, helping to carry out the WHO missions in accordance with their designated terms of reference (TOR) and activities (2). On the other hand, these centers enhance their national role by being designated as WHOCCs, and the number of active WHOCCs in a country can also help that country play its regional and international roles and exercise scientific authority. Also, the outcomes of these activities can help achieve national targets. In the meantime, one of the most important points is active leadership to establish coordination and active communication between these WHOCCs within the country and the region (2).

In this regard, in Iran, as a country with 18 WHOCCs (Table 1) (3), having the largest number of collaborating centers in EMRO, a national meeting of WHOCCs in Iran was held for the first time in June 2014, and in February 2015, as an outcome of the second meeting, the secretariat of WHOCCs in Iran was launched, hosted by Kerman University of Medical Sciences, on behalf of Ministry of Health and Medical Education (4).

This active development of cooperation was curtailed between 2020 and 2023, and after the sixth national meeting in 2020, the secretariat became inactive during these years, and no new WHOCCs were established in Iran.

Since 2024, this strategy has shifted toward greater cooperation with the WHO based on national interests, with the country playing a more prominent role in the region

through strengthening Iran's scientific authority. In this regard, the seventh national meeting of WHO collaborating centers (WHOCCs) in Iran was held on November 19, 2025, after a 4-year hiatus (Figure 1). There were high authorities from Iranian ministry of health and WHO attends in this meeting (online and in person), including Prof. Dr. Shahin Akhoundzadeh, vice minister for research and technology; Prof. Dr. Alireza Raeisi, vice minister for health; Dr. Alireza Biglari, director general of international affairs at the ministry; Dr. Awad Mataria, acting WHO representative in Iran; and many of their directors and deputies. Also, the chairs and executives of WHOCCs in Iran attended and reported their activities. At this meeting, the EMRO office also held a workshop on writing reports for collaborating centers.

Following this meeting, the headquarters for WHOCCs was reactivated in the department of research and technology, in cooperation with the international affairs office at the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, to supervise and manage issues related to WHOCCs in Iran. Subsequently, in close collaboration with the WHO representative office in Iran, efforts were initiated to identify new potential candidates for designation as WHOCCs, and 3 cases have been completed at the national level and are under review at various levels within the WHO, EMRO, and the Headquarters. Also, the 18th Iranian WHOCC, located at the Pasteur Institute for Vector-Borne Diseases, was designated in January 2025. Furthermore, assistance was provided to centers whose terms had expired or were about to expire by submitting and completing the necessary documents and reports to secure redesignation for another 4-year term.

Another important issue with this new strategy is the possibility of the Ministry of Health and Medical Educa-

Corresponding author: Dr Arman Zargaran, azargaran@sina.tums.ac.ir

¹ Department of Traditional Pharmacy, School of Persian Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

² Center of Excellence for Global Health (CEGH), Department of Global Health, School of Public Health, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

³ Head, International Affairs Unit, Vice Minister's Office for Research and Development, Ministry of Health and Medical Education, Tehran, Iran

Table 1. Current active WHOCCs in Iran (sorted alphabetically based on the hosted names)

Raw	WHOCC Name	Host of WHOCC
1	WHOCC for Ear and Hearing Care Research and Education	Iran University of Medical Sciences/ The Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Research Center
2	WHO Collaborating Center for Mental Health	Iran University of Medical Sciences/ School of Behavioral Sciences and Mental Health
3	WHO Collaborating Center for Education and Research in Nursing and Midwifery	Iran University of Medical Sciences/ Nursing and Midwifery Care Research Center
4	WHO Collaborating Center for Hospital Management	Iran University of Medical Sciences/ School of Health Management and Information Sciences
5	WHOCC for Research and Training on Blood Safety	Iranian Blood Transfusion Organization (IBTO)
6	WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Training in Cardiovascular Diseases Control, Prevention, and Rehabilitation for Cardiac Patients	Isfahan University of Medical Sciences/ Cardiovascular Research Center
7	WHOCC for HIV surveillance	Kerman University of Medical Sciences/ Regional Knowledge Hub for HIV surveillance
8	WHO Collaborating Center for Quality Control and Clinical Chemistry	Ministry of Health and Medical Education/ Reference Laboratories of Iran, Biochemistry Department
9	WHO Collaborating Center for Reference & Research on Rabies	Pasteur Institute of Iran/ National Center for Reference & Research on Rabies
10	WHO Collaborating Center for Vector-Borne Diseases	Pasteur Institute of Iran/ Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Research Center for Emerging and Reemerging Infectious Diseases
11	WHO Collaborating Center for Tuberculosis Education	Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences/ National Research Institute of Tuberculosis & Lung Diseases (NRITLD)
12	WHO Collaborating Center for Eye Care and Prevention of Blindness	Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences/ Ophthalmic Research Center, Labafinejad Medical Center
13	WHO Collaborating Center for Research on Nutrition and Food Technology	Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences/ National Nutrition & Food Technology Research Institute (NNFTRI)
14	WHOCC for Training and Research on Health System Management	Tabriz University of Medical Sciences/ National Public Health Management Center (NPMC)
15	WHOCC for Bioethics	Tehran University of Medical Sciences/ The Medical Ethics and History of Medicine Research Center (EMRI)
16	WHOCC for Research on NCDs and Gastrointestinal Cancers	Tehran University of Medical Sciences/ Digestive Diseases Research Institute (DDRI)
17	WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Education on Management of Osteoporosis and Diabetes	Tehran University of Medical Sciences/ Endocrinology and Metabolism Research Institute (EMRI)
18	WHO Collaborating Center for Research and Training on Substance Use Disorders and Mental Health	Tehran University of Medical Sciences/ Iranian National Center for Addiction Studies (INCAS)



Figure 1. The memorial photo of the seventh national meeting of WHO collaborating centers in Iran, Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education headquarters building, November 19, 2025, Tehran

tion supervising and monitoring the performance of these collaborating centers. Receiving periodic performance

reports from the WHOCCs and monitoring the reports sent to the WHO have enabled this process to be guided

by a national concept, so that the development of these centers can be carried out in a targeted manner, aligned with national considerations and actions.

Finally, given Iran's strong position and capabilities, the country can play an important regional and global role in promoting health, one of the key tools of which can be the rational development of WHO collaborating centers in line with the mutual interests of the country and WHO.

Acknowledgment

N/A.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions

The author has full contribution to the provided content.

Ethical Considerations

Not applicable.

Funding Support

N/A.

Data Availability

N/A.

AI Use Statement

N/A.

References

1. Collaborating Centers. World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/about/collaboration/collaborating-centres#:~:text=By%20definition,%20a%20WHO>. Accessed on March 6, 2026.
2. Achab S, Saraceno B. Strengthening global health cooperation-insights from worldwide WHO collaborating centers. *Health Policy Open*. 2025;10:100158.
3. Collaborating Centers located in Iran. Available at: <https://research.behdasht.gov.ir/WHOCC>. Accessed on March 6, 2026.
4. Sharifi H, Akbarein H, Akhondzadeh S, Amirkhani M, Asadi-Lari M, et al. Establishment of the National Network of WHO Collaborating Centers in Iran to Contribute to the National Public Health Needs. *Arch Iran Med*. 2015;18(8):558-9.