COBATEST Membership

Terms of Reference

The COBATEST Network links community-based voluntary counselling and testing (CBVCT) services across the WHO European Region. It was established in 2009 within the HIV-COBATEST project under the European Union Public Health Programme. The COBATEST mission is to promote HIV and other STI testing and linkage to care and treatment, to improve CBVCT services across Europe, to share good practices, procedures and information to improve CBVCT activities, and to provide tools to strengthen collaborative work between professionals.

Community based voluntary counseling and testing is any programme or service that offers HIV, STI and/or viral hepatitis counseling and testing outside formal health facilities. It has been designed to target specific groups within key affected populations and is clearly adapted and accessible to those communities. It encompasses rapid testing and laboratory testing. Moreover, these services should ensure the active participation of the community with the involvement of community representatives either in planning or implementing HIV, STI and/or viral hepatitis testing interventions and strategies.

In countries where restrictions do not allow VCT outside healthcare facilities, community based organisations or groups can become members of the COBATEST network if they are actively involved in planning and implementing the services inside health care facilities.

Membership Criteria

Organisations in the WHO European Region that offer CBVCT (HIV/STI/viral hepatitis) services can become a member of the COBATEST Network. The membership is free but members need to commit themselves to and endorse the mission and procedures of the COBATEST Network. New members must sign a declaration to confirm that their data collection processes comply with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Members who do not submit data on testing activity for two years in a row will be considered inactive. Inactive members may lose the right to vote (see voting criteria) and may not have priority for activities funded by the COBATEST Network. The decision on the loss / retention of the vote is taken by the Steering Committee by voting with simple majority.

Membership application procedure

All applicants need to fill in an electronic membership application form. The COBATEST Network secretary will confirm the receipt of the application and verify the application details, to make sure that they comply with the membership criteria. The application will then be sent to the COBATEST Steering Committee for final approval. The members of the Steering Committee will review and consider the membership application and decide whether to grant membership. If an SC member objects to the membership, a specific (online) meeting will be organised to discuss and agree upon the request. Memberships need to be approved by simple majority within the SC. No later than one month after the receipt of the application, the applicants will be informed by email about the decision of the SC.

Benefits for the membership

COBATEST Network members who are civil society organisations have active and passive voting rights for the Steering Committee. Their representatives can stand for SC elections and are eligible to vote for the SC. There is one vote per organization, and one person per organization is eligible as a candidate for SC elections.

To ensure active participation and eligibility, only COBATEST member organizations that have submitted data within the last two years can nominate representatives for election. However, all COBATEST members, regardless of data submission, can vote if they have pre-registered for voting. The pre-registration form is included in call announcement.
Members can provide input on the annual work plan and the advocacy strategy of the network.

- Members have Information on a regular basis about relevant developments and events in the field. This includes funding opportunities, grants, scholarships and calls for proposals, conferences and other funding related changes.
- Members can build contacts and partnerships within the network.
- Members can exchange experiences and knowledge in the field with organisations around Europe.
- Members have free access to the COBATEST data entry tool and with the tool they can control their own dataset. They can also request specific analysis of their data from the COBATEST Network.
- Members can benefit from raising awareness at European level of their organisation's concerns through the COBATEST network.
- Members contribute to the evidence base for CBVCT programming in Europe.
- Members receive technical support in the field of capacity building and advocacy
- Members can participate in the annual COBATEST Network conference (either by attending and / or contributing to the preparation/ programming) and can represent at other international / national meetings under the COBATEST Network auspices under approval of the Steering Committee.
- Members of the Network are granted priority rights for project and grant funding regarding CBCVT. The final funding decision is made by the Steering Committee.

Responsibilities of COBATEST Members

- COBATEST member organisations submit yearly data from their organisation's VCT activity. They contribute to the network's reporting and monitoring. If the data collection form of the Network member on CBVCTs differs from the established form for COBATEST, then CEESCAT as the M&E manager determines in each individual case a data presentation form that would be convenient for all parties. COBATEST member organisations assure the quality and correctness of data collection with a pre-formulated declaration that needs to be signed by the representative of the organization.
- Members inform the network of relevant developments with regards to CBVCT in their country throughout the year.
- Members support the dissemination and information sharing of the network through their own information channels.

- The Network members may represent the Network's activities publicly (at the meetings, conferences, etc.), with the consent or at the request of the Steering Committee.

Exclusion criteria

In case an organization or individual member acts against the mission and vision of the COBATEST Network, the SC can decide to exclude them from membership. This decision will be taken with simple majority by voting of the SC members. The decision should be validated by the COBATEST members.

Voting criteria

Any member organization, temporarily or permanently, can be stripped of its voting rights in case data have not been submitted for two years in a row.