

The WHO Executive Board (EB148) in 2021

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The [COVID-19 pandemic](#) and attempts to achieve a global response will be high on the agenda at the [148th Session of World Health Organization \(WHO\) Executive Board \(EB148\)](#), held between 18 and 20 of January. But Member States and other stakeholders will also be considering other pressing topics, such as the state of implementation of the Global Strategy and Plan of Action on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property, a proposal to reform the Non-State Actors engagement with WHO governing bodies and challenges for access to treatments to rare and orphan diseases.

[Health Action International \(HAI\)](#) will be following the proceedings at the WHO Executive Board closely and delivering several statements on access to medicines issues. We will use this opportunity to advocate for greater transparency in pharmaceutical markets, including accountability for pricing decisions, clarity on the actual costs of research and development (R&D), and to emphasise the importance of meaningful civil society engagement. Underpinning our statements will be a sentiment we've held since the beginning of this pandemic: business as usual will not be enough to tackle the current crisis, nor will it be enough to prepare for the next one. It is high-time the private sector heeded the call of WHO Director General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and joined the efforts of stakeholders, including academia, scientific research institutions and public interest non-governmental organisations to build a truly global response based on cooperation and collaboration for a greater, common good.

COVID-19 did not happen in a void but within a specific framework. This has been shaped by misalignment of R&D priorities, excessive pricing and disparate availability, among other obstacles to access to medicines. There is no better example than insulin, with this year marking the centenary of its discovery, for which access is still a challenge for far too many. We will take the opportunity to raise our voice at EB148 to demand the international community take specific, binding and effective action at the next [World Health Assembly](#).