



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## Essential drugs and medical supplies policy

### Introduction

In line with its humanitarian mandate the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has been heavily involved in the improvement of the health of the population in general and that of the most vulnerable in particular. Essential Drugs play a crucial role in the prevention and control of diseases. In spite of the ever increasing production and distribution of pharmaceuticals, acute shortages and irrational use of essential drugs are prevalent in most parts of the world. Moreover, the emerging and re-emerging diseases, epidemiological transition and increasing resistance to drugs have compounded the problem.

In order to meet this challenge and continue to strive to protect, preserve and restore the health of the most vulnerable populations, the International Federation finds it necessary to adopt a comprehensive policy on essential drugs which includes vaccines and medical supplies. This policy will form the basis for the guidelines which will contain, among others, innovative approaches which assist the National Societies and the International Federation in their endeavours.

### Scope

This policy is directed towards addressing the aforementioned constraints by indicating new approaches that ensure provision of good quality essential drugs. Besides, it outlines the responsibilities within emergency response operations and in the area of improvement of the health of the population through long term developmental health programmes.

It covers the efforts of National Societies at country levels in supporting line ministries in the development of national drug policies and legislation and in the implementation of essential drug programmes. Furthermore, it underscores the linkages of essential drug activities to other primary health care (PHC) activities.

### Statement

The International Federation and National Societies shall:

- Seek to implement an Essential Drugs Programme as part of the broader health policy for attaining the goal of health for all based on the primary health care strategy. National Societies shall get involved in the implementation of an Essential Drugs Programme when needs and conducive situations prevail.
- The International Federation and National Societies shall base selection of drugs and medical supplies primarily on the national list of essential drugs. Where such a list is non-existent or incomplete, the World Health Organization list of essential drugs can be used with a focus on the basic health needs of the target population.

- Use the international non-proprietary names (generic) in drugs selection and procurement whenever feasible.
- Adopt a procurement strategy that ensures the availability of drugs of good quality, safety and efficacy at the lowest possible price without undermining the financial sustainability.
- Apply the World Health Organization Certification Scheme on the quality of pharmaceutical products moving in international commerce and other feasible methods for assessing the quality of pharmaceutical products in the process of procurement.
- Undertake all measures for organizing proper storage and a distribution system that safeguard managerial efficiency and ensure adequate quality of the pharmaceuticals at all levels.
- Request donors to observe the obligation of providing good quality essential drugs with an acceptable range of shelf-life.
- Adopt the World Health Organization guidelines for drug donation and take all possible measures to ensure their application at all levels.
- Support the rational use of essential drugs and medical supplies through the promotion of rational procurement, distribution, prescription, dispensing and consumption of pharmaceutical products at all levels. To this effect, organize and undertake educational activities for selected categories of health care workers and consumers in collaboration with national and international organizations and formulate the necessary guidelines that assist the establishment of a sound supply and management system.
- Undertake activities at country level to support line ministries in the development of national drug policies and legislation that promote the concept of essential drugs and participate in the implementation of the like in areas possible.
- Take appropriate measures complying with national and / or international guidelines for the timely disposal of expired and unwanted drugs.

## **Responsibilities**

Both National Societies and the International Federation have the responsibility to ensure that the selection, procurement, storage and distribution of all pharmaceuticals and medical supplies at all levels of the Federation's and National Societies' interventions are carried out in line with this policy; that the staff and volunteers involved in the execution of the programmes are well oriented as to the rationale and content of this policy and that collaborating organizations at local, regional, national and international levels are aware of the details of the policy.

The Federation Secretariat has the responsibility of developing guidelines, procedures and other tools that support National Societies' interventions at country level. Similarly, National Societies, if involved, must identify their role at country level and seek collaboration with line ministries, other governmental organizations, country based NGOs and international institutions.

## **References**

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This policy was adopted by the 12th Session of the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, October 1999. This policy replaces all previously established general policies on Essential Drugs and Medical Supplies.