29 August 2019 - Today, WHO announces it is the first of the United Nations agencies to join a coalition of research funders and charitable foundations (cOAlition S), an initiative to make full and immediate open access to research publications a reality. cOAlition S is built around Plan S , which consists of 10 principles to ensure that the results from publicly-funded research, must be published in Open Access Journals, on Open Access Platforms, or made immediately available through Open Access Repositories without embargo.

"WHO champions the right of everybody to access quality health care services, and our support for open access to the health research that underpins that care goes hand-in-hand with that commitment," said WHO Chief Scientist Dr Soumya Swaminathan. "By joining this coalition, we believe we can accelerate progress towards universal free access to health research – an ambition that supports our current strategy of one billion more people benefiting from universal health coverage over the next five years."

WHO has a long history of making health information and evidence widely accessible. One of the first milestones on this journey was the Hinari Access to Research for Health Programme, which was set up by WHO in 2002 and today provides access to 15 000 medical journals for health workers and researchers in 120 countries. In 2014, WHO introduced its policy on open access to ensure that journal articles and book chapters authored or co-authored by WHO staff members or produced by researchers funded by the Organization were freely available in Europe PubMed Central . This policy was extended in 2016 to ensure all WHO publications are freely available in the WHO Institutional Repository for Information Sharing (IRIS).

There are many open-access publishing platforms now where authors can ensure their works are widely available. One of the research programmes within WHO's new Science Division, the UNICEF/UNDP/World Bank/WHO Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (TDR), has developed one such open-access publishing platform. TDR Gateway provides greater opportunities to TDR-supported researchers to publish the results of their work and to make them available to the public for free.

"There are numerous challenges for researchers, and sadly, one of these is limited access to current science literature. Thanks to the Plan S initiative, this will soon no longer remain a barrier to good research," said Charles Mgone, Vice Chancellor of Hubert Kairuki Memorial

University in United Republic of Tanzania. “I strongly support the position of WHO in joining cOAlition S and feel this is another major step forward in achieving universal access to health information.”

“We are delighted the World Health Organization is joining cOAlition S, marking an important day for health research,” said Jeremy Farrar, Director of Wellcome. “In joining the partnership, the WHO’s global reach will play a vital in role in supporting researchers and institutions in member states in making their research fully Open Access so that it is freely and immediately available to all. Wellcome is committed to working towards a fully Open Access world when no research is behind a paywall.“