Social Media toolkit
A WHA Resolution:
Folic Acid Fortification to Prevent Spina Bifida

The 75th session of the World Health Assembly (WHA75)
Introduction

The 75th session of the World Health Assembly (WHA75) will take place in Geneva, Switzerland from May 22-28, 2022.

On this occasion, the G4 Alliance, the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF), and GAPSBi-F will hold the Side Event titled, “WHA Resolution: Folic Acid Fortification to Prevent Spina Bifida” on the 24th of May 2022 in Hilton Geneva Hotels and Conference Center.

Why does this side event need to take place?

Recognizing the 63rd World Health Assembly’s Resolution on Birth Defects that appealed to member states to prioritize prevention of birth defects, the high number of pregnancies affected by folic acid-preventable spina bifida and anencephaly globally are concerning.

Worldwide, at least 300,000 pregnancies are estimated to be affected with spina bifida and anencephaly annually, and 75% of them result in elective terminations, stillbirths, or under-five deaths. Those who survive have life-long paralysis and neurologic impairment; most require multiple surgeries, unavailable in low- and middle-income countries. Families face stigma and cannot afford the cost of care.

Folic acid fortification is the most effective public health strategy to prevent spina bifida and anencephaly equitably in the population. Fortified staple foods provide folic acid to women of reproductive age at a critical time in pregnancy, without requiring behavior modification, preventing spina bifida and anencephaly.

Mandatory food fortification with adequate folic acid has been implemented in 58 countries since the late 1990s. Folic acid fortification is safe, effective, and has high cost-benefit ratio. Yet, over 100 countries lack this intervention, adversely impacting the most vulnerable populations.

This side event will bring together key stakeholders, including policymakers, patient care leaders, NGOs, and member states, to discuss a way forward toward a WHA resolution on folic acid fortification to prevent spina bifida.
The World Health Assembly

The World Health Assembly (WHA) is the World Health Organization's (WHO) decision-making body, where the Member States come together to vote. It takes place in May and is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States. The assembly focuses on a specific health-related agenda prepared by the Executive Board (WHO EB).

The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine WHO policies, programmes and budgets, in addition to appointing the Director-General.

Advocating to the WHO: key phrases

Several things are needed to have a resolution pass. First of all, support from multiple partners and WHO Member States as well as the support of the Executive Board in order to make it on the agenda of the WHA.

Advocacy towards members of the Executive board is key!

Executive Board: Implements the decisions of the WHA and decides which resolutions go on the agenda for the WHA. Main meeting is in January each year. A WHO Member State is elected to serve on the Executive Board for a 3 year term. The Member State then designates a person who is technically qualified in the field of health to represent the Member State on the board.

Director General: Nominated by the Executive Board and appointed by the WHA.
Support actions to create a WHO resolution on folic acid fortification

Join the G4 Alliance, the International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF) and GAPSBI-f to raise awareness on the important topic of folic acid fortification.

How?

Social media key messages were developed for you to share with your network as of May 24th across your social media portals, more specifically through Twitter.

Prevention is a collaborative effort.

Together with you we can raise awareness all around the world on the importance of folic acid fortification in the prevention of neural tube defects!
In 2019 alone, 65,380 #BirthDefects were prevented globally due to wheat and maize flour fortified with #FolicAcid—an average of 179 healthier babies every day. Yet this is only 23% of total possible prevention. Countries must act now to mandate #FoodFortification and save lives.

Fortifying foods with nutrients like #FolicAcid is key to achieving a healthier, more equitable food system. #Fortification is an accessible way to provide a baseline of essential vitamins & minerals, improve wellbeing, and help societies become more resilient in times of crisis.

Food fortification with #FolicAcid is highly cost saving in every country, and the benefit from investing in food #Fortification is comparable to other life-saving programs like insecticide-treated bed nets, or rotavirus vaccines #WHA75 #PreventSpinaBifida.

Hashtags to use:
#WHA75
#FolicAcid
#Fortification
#PreventSpinaBifida

Accounts to tag:
@GAPSBIF
@ifsbh
@theG4Alliance
Social media - Key messages

July 2021 marked the 30th anniversary of the trial by the British Medical Research Council showing #FolicAcid (vitamin B9) prevents most cases of #SpinaBifida and #Anencephaly, yet prevention has reached only a quarter of all preventable cases. We must act now for #Fortification!

WHA resolution on #FolicAcid #Fortification of staple foods will assist more than 100 countries reach their 2030 SDGs on child mortality and health equity. Inaction is costing lives. #WHA75 #PreventSpinaBifida

An urgent call to action to prevent folic acid-preventable #SpinaBifida and #Anencephaly, globally through food #Fortification with #FolicAcid – 30 years and waiting. #PreventSpinaBifida #WHA75 #ChildMortality #SDG2030

There is a global burden and inequality associated with preventable #SpinaBifida. Governments can immediately prevent this major #BirthDefects through mandatory policies on folic acid fortification of staple foods. #WHA75 #FolicAcid #Fortification #SDG2030 #PreventSpinaBifida

Hashtags to use: #WHA75 #FolicAcid #Fortification #PreventSpinaBifida

Accounts to tag: @GAPSBIF @ifsbh @theG4Alliance
Mandatory #Fortification of staple foods with #FolicAcid remains the most effective, economical, and equitable strategy to address nutritional deficiency in women of reproductive age leading to preventable #BirthDefects. #WHA75 #PreventSpinaBifida #SDG2030

Join the cause to be a champion for #FolicAcid fortification of staple foods and #PreventSpinaBifida and #Anencephaly. Advocate for folic acid #Fortification in your country. Many resources exist to help countries implement food fortification. #WHA75

Hashtags to use:
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Social media - Key messages

The following two messages are to be posted together as a thread on Twitter:

Many organizations have joined hands to promote mandatory #Fortification of staple foods with #FolicAcid. Stakeholders include epidemiologists, families of patients with #SpinaBifida, neurosurgeons, pediatricians, food fortification experts, health policy experts, and others.

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Raise your voice for a cause that will benefit hundreds of thousands of babies worldwide. Advocate #FolicAcid fortification of staple foods. 
#PreventSpinaBifida #Fortification

Hashtags to use: 
#WHA75 #FolicAcid #Fortification #PreventSpinaBifida

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Social media - Key messages

These two messages can be posted to react to Tweets about SDGs and climate change to draw attention on the resolution:

Mandating food #fortification of flour and rice with essential vitamins and minerals including iron and #FolicAcid will help countries meet #SDGs targets by 2030. #WHA75 #SDG2030 #PreventSpinaBifida

#ClimateChange will lead to nutrient deficiencies as the rise in carbon in the atmosphere decreases the nutritional quality of foods. #Fortification of staple foods with #FolicAcid can help offset the nutrients lost due to rising CO2 emissions. #WHA75 #PreventSpinaBifida
Infographic to use on Twitter

Hashtags to use:
#WHA75
#FolicAcid
#Fortification
#PreventSpinaBifida

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The picture below can be added to the key messages shared on social media

Food fortification with folic acid is:
- Effective everywhere
- Safe for everyone

Food fortification with folic acid is highly cost saving

There is a need for a World Health Assembly (WHA) resolution supporting large-scale food fortification with folic acid.

A WHA resolution will accelerate fortification policy and help countries reach their 2030 Sustainable Development Goals on child mortality and health equity.

Be a champion for folic acid fortification
- Saves lives
- Saves money
- Saves resources

Contact: gapsbif@who.int
Website: www.thesg4alliance.org/gapsbf

216,600
Annual cases of spina bifida and anencephaly occur worldwide. This can be prevented.

Folic acid (vitamin B9) prevents spina bifida F and anencephaly.

23%
Only about 60 countries have mandatory folic acid fortification policy for wheat flour, maize flour, and/or rice. This is preventing just 23% of all folic acid preventable spina bifida and anencephaly worldwide.

Examine with effective mandatory folic acid fortification policies for wheat flour, maize flour, and/or rice.
Useful links

- Learn more about the WHA75. Click here.
- Check out IF Maternal Health and Prevention video. Click here.
- Read papers on folic acid fortification. Click here.
- Smarter Futures – An African way to Promote Food Fortification. Click here.
- Advocacy Tool to Promote the Implementation of Folic Acid Intervention. Click here.
- Food Fortification Global Progress. Click here.
- Global Fortification Data Exchange (GFDx). Click here.
CONTACT DETAILS

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