

The road to the 2026 UN High-Level Meeting

A decisive opportunity for global political leadership

May 2025

In a world beset by uncertainty, The Independent Panel has maintained that political leaders have the power and responsibility to prevent and rapidly respond to pandemic threats. Despite the devastating losses of the COVID-19 pandemic and ever-present infectious threats, most leaders have turned their attention elsewhere—and yet the warning signs remain loud and clear.

Five years on from the start of the COVID-19 emergency, multiple public health outbreaks, including mpox, Marburg, Ebola, and H5N1, reveal enduring vulnerabilities. These outbreaks highlight continued access barriers to rapid tests, vaccines, and other essential tools and to flaws in coordinated, multisectoral emergency response. They also underscore a lack of investment in a One Health approach that would integrate and unify efforts to protect the health of people, animals, and ecosystems.

Working to make the world safer from pandemic threats is neither a theoretical nor purely technocratic exercise; it has real-life implications for people's health and livelihoods and for economic stability. This is a task that requires the leadership of presidents and prime ministers. Our message to them remains clear:



A new pandemic threat will emerge—as leaders, you have a responsibility to act now and not gamble with your country's future.



In 2025 countries are looking inwards, uncertain how to face a rapidly evolving geopolitical and geo-economic landscape. Yet as tens of millions of people cross borders every day, the health of each nation is deeply intertwined. Countries should be in no doubt that cooperation and coordination are essential to strengthen defences and build resilience to detect and stop the next pathogen with pandemic potential.

Given this challenging multilateral landscape, there are decisive opportunities for leaders to commit to building a world safer from pandemic threats. The World Health Assembly's adoption of the pandemic agreement text demonstrates the potential of multilateral cooperation. It now needs the full backing of all leaders to come into force as soon as possible. Leaders must take all opportunities

to build upon this, including through their economic blocs, the World Health Assembly, and regional initiatives and platforms.

The second UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting (HLM) on Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response (PPPR) is scheduled for 2026. This is a decisive moment to bring all UN Member States together with international organisations and civil society to align around a common agenda for investment and action. Here we set out a road map to leverage this political opportunity to make all countries safer from pandemic threats.

The 2026 UN High-Level Meeting

High-Level Meetings on health and One Health matters, including HIV, TB, universal health coverage, noncommunicable diseases, and antimicrobial resistance, take issues beyond ministers and Ministries of Health. They can galvanise multi-sectoral action and the leadership of Heads of State and Government.

The first-ever HLM on PPPR in September 2023 resulted in a political declaration that must now be built upon by agreeing measurable commitments on the way forward.

The HLM presents a unique opportunity to convene Heads of State and Government with all multilateral agencies and civil society organisations that play roles in pandemic prevention, preparedness and response efforts. It provides a platform to help consolidate efforts across other key forums, including the World Health Assembly, the G7, G20, and in regional fora. It is also an opportunity to bring diverse groups together, especially those most affected by and at the forefront of tackling outbreaks, such as countries known as the V20, those in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and from across the G77.

Negotiation of the modalities resolution

As per the Political Declaration of the 2023 HLM on PPPR, a second meeting should take place in 2026 with the modalities for that meeting negotiated within the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly (i.e., before 9 September 2025). Italy and Viet Nam are the co-facilitators for the modalities resolution, which will set out the format, participation, and organisational details, including speaking arrangements, civil society involvement, expected outcomes, and timeline.

Our recommendations for the modalities resolution:

1. **Timing:** Schedule the HLM early during the UN High-Level week in September 2026.
2. **Highest-level political engagement:** Recognise that pandemic prevention, preparedness and response are a whole-of-government and whole-of-society issue that require leadership from Heads of State and Government.
3. **Multisectoral leadership:** Highlight that PPPR is not only a human health issue but requires engagement across levels of government, sectors, and disciplines. Create space for organisations across the One Health spectrum to engage, and where appropriate, lead within the process, including the four members of the Quadripartite*. Ensure space for engagement of a breadth of organisations and constituencies, including multilateral development banks, global health initiatives (e.g., Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria), those engaged in relevant areas such as children's welfare and education, and academics, civil society, and Indigenous Peoples.
4. **Progress and major gaps to date:** Recognise the progress by WHO Member States to adopt the text of the pandemic agreement, but also the slow pace of action and investment including towards equity and sufficient finance for pandemic preparedness and emergency response.
5. **Civil society engagement:** Hold an interactive multi-stakeholder hearing by May 2026 to enable civil society contributions to inform the negotiations. Commit to include civil society in official meetings, side events, and consultations during the negotiations and in the HLM, with clear and transparent processes for how these organisations can engage.
6. **Theme:** Set an ambitious theme reflecting that while some progress has been made, five years since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, major gaps remain across pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. Acknowledge the need for urgent actions to make the world safer from pandemic threats, especially for the most vulnerable countries, and recognise that risks are increasing due to climate change, biodiversity loss, and gaps in biosecurity.

The importance of strong civil society engagement

Community knowledge and resilience are a critical pillar of successful pandemic preparedness and response. Community leaders, health and outreach workers, and risk communicators will report disease outbreaks, provide care and information, social protection, and help people understand and adhere to public health measures.

A Civil Society Engagement Mechanism helps to ensure coordinated, formal, and diverse civil society inputs into the HLM process, outcomes, and follow-up

* Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Environment Programme, World Health Organization, and World Organisation for Animal Health.

mechanisms. The Stop TB Partnership, UHC2030, civil society organisations (CSOs) and Indigenous Peoples groups have shown that such a mechanism is key to a political declaration that is reflective of community needs and priorities, sets bold commitments, and helps to ensure accountability.



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During the first HLM on PPPR in 2023, like-minded CSOs coordinated and engaged, but there was no single, adequately financed mechanism through which CSOs could organise and engage with Member States. Given the time required to establish such a platform, and for interested groups to organise, we call on like-minded CSOs and funders to work together and build a platform that can help deliver a successful HLM and a meaningful political declaration.

The road to the 2026 HLM: What can be achieved

The 2026 HLM will be a moment to reflect on progress, including against the 2023 political declaration. It is a time to consider the advances in science and knowledge of the past three years and to set an ambitious vision and path forward that addresses the remaining gaps across the system.

The political declaration should include bold commitments including on the issues outlined in these policy briefs, covering financing, an equitable ecosystem for medical countermeasures, and a more robust system of monitoring risks and readiness.

The process and outcomes should champion the pandemic agreement. This includes actively encouraging efforts to achieve the requisite number of ratifications for it to come into force, and preparing for its full implementation. It should also support full implementation of the amended International Health Regulations.

This is also time to advance the concept of the emergency platform for complex global shocks, which will continue to be developed within the Pact for the Future. The United Nations General Assembly is the only place where such a platform to coordinate action on existential threats can be realised—whether for pandemics, nuclear accidents, or climate catastrophes—and it is an essential, but missing piece of the current global architecture.

Key moments and milestones on the road to the 2026 HLM

Pandemic Agreement adopted at the WHA

(May 2025): The pandemic agreement has been adopted by the World Health Assembly. An Intergovernmental Working Group will be established to negotiate the pathogen access and benefits sharing annex, and should agree a clear time-bound work plan and provisions for expert and relevant stakeholder engagement. Preparatory work to establish the Conference of the Parties should also commence as soon as possible.

G7 Canada (June 2025): G7 countries should reaffirm their commitment in the 2024 Apulia Leaders' Communiqué to strengthening pandemic preparedness and response efforts, including for preparedness and response financing.

Secretary-General's report on the first political declaration (by September 2025):

The UN Secretary-General will release a report documenting implementation of the 2023 declaration on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. This should set out clear recommendations to inform what is needed for a successful HLM in 2026.

Modalities resolution adopted for the 2026

HLM (before 9 September 2025): The modalities resolution should be adopted for the 2026 High-Level Meeting. The resolution should incorporate all of the above recommendations and provide a platform for multisectoral and civil society engagement in the process. This will pave the way for an ambitious political declaration with measurable commitments.

The amended International Health Regulations come into force (19 September 2025):

All State Parties and the World Health Organization should be fully implementing the amended IHRs, and State Parties have should have functioning National IHR Authorities.

G20 South Africa (November 2025): The G20 should affirm PPPR as a priority and place equity at the core. The outcome declaration should provide clarity on fully financing PPPR, underscore

the importance of the pandemic agreement and the amended IHRs, build on improving equitable access to medical countermeasures, including through the Global Coalition for Local and Regional Production, Innovation and Equitable Access, and commit to a successful HLM in 2026.

Conference on Public Health in Africa

(November 2025):** The African Union should commit to full participation at the UN HLM. Members of the AU should also commit to increase domestic financing for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

World Health Assembly (May 2026): Ideally, the PABS (pathogen access and benefit sharing) annex text is agreed and adopted at the 79th World Health Assembly. The pandemic agreement is then opened for signature, with Member States signing then ratifying or acceding the treaty as rapidly as possible. Preparations for the first Conference of the Parties should be well underway.

Multi-stakeholder hearing for UN High-Level Meeting on PPPR (May 2026):** An interactive multi-stakeholder hearing should be held with diverse civil society contributions to inform the negotiations.

Negotiations of the Political Declaration

(May-August 2026):** Member States should be negotiating the Political Declaration. Organisations across the One Health spectrum, especially the Quadripartite, are encouraged to engage throughout. Civil society organisations are provided the possibility to participate in official meetings, side events, and consultations during the negotiations.

UN High-Level Meeting on PPPR (September

2026): Heads of State and Government from all regions participate in the HLM, along with representatives from civil society. A strong political declaration should be agreed setting out clear commitments that support and enhance existing efforts, including the Pandemic Agreement.

** Timing estimated based on previous practice.

Closing message—a decisive opportunity not to be missed

Political leadership for PPPR is essential for maintaining momentum to close the gaps that make all countries vulnerable to future pandemic threats. It is also the foundation upon which countries cooperate and work together effectively in times of crisis. The 2026 HLM provides a unique platform to reenergise political commitment and leadership that has faded in recent years. It is a decisive opportunity to focus world attention on the ever-present threats of another pandemic and set an ambitious vision and course of action that will keep all people, everywhere, safer.