



# **WeCAHN TERMS OF REFERENCE**

## **BACKGROUND**

The Western Canadian Animal Health Network (WeCAHN) is a vision for an animal health intelligence network within Western Canada linking diagnostic, surveillance and research networks to provide early detection of emerging disease threats, ongoing tracking for diseases that already exist, and research into improved prevention, mitigation and response.

Canada has a long history of strong terrestrial animal health surveillance and disease control programs based upon officially designated, federally reportable, and notifiable diseases. These diseases pose a major threat to animal health, human health, and our trade in food animal products. In a large country with diverse ecological and production systems, it is a challenge to create a collaborative approach to the rapid identification, characterization, and response to new and emerging diseases, production-limiting diseases, or other health-limiting conditions that are not currently listed in federal regulations.

Past efforts as a one-size-fits-all national animal health surveillance system have not been able to address the regional and sectoral needs by recognizing the distinct differences in animal agriculture production systems across the country. In response, different stand-alone systems have sprung up – some of which are species-based and others which are province/territory-based. As a result, it has been very difficult to share animal health intelligence among the various sectors, the various levels of governments and the academic community. This has led to duplication of efforts, gaps in capacity and less than optimal knowledge transfer and advancement.

WeCAHN is intended to be a permanent, sustainable framework for supporting animal health and welfare and veterinary public health in western Canada. The purpose of WeCAHN is to build an animal health surveillance system that connects producers, veterinarians, researchers and policy makers with the information needed to protect and improve animal health. A key component of WeCAHN is to function as part of a broader provincial and national early warning system for disease outbreaks. A fully functional western area surveillance system will be a “network of networks”, with components dedicated to specific species groups. It is anticipated that as WeCAHN grows, the network will extend

beyond the surveillance of disease syndromes-pathogens to also include the collection of information on system vulnerabilities capable of adversely affecting animal health and welfare, such as animal health supply chain shortages or livestock transportation issues.

## VISION

- To advance enhanced animal health intelligence in western Canada, to protect animal health, public health and trade

## MANDATE / MISSION

- To provide regional leadership in animal health and welfare surveillance, connect people to animal health data sources, and generate timely actionable information for western Canadian stakeholders regarding on-going or emerging animal health concerns.
- To coordinate and share animal health surveillance information with the other regional networks in Canada; the Ontario Animal Health Network (OAHN) in Ontario, Réseau D'Alerte Et D'Information Zoosanitaire (RAIZO) in Quebec and the Atlantic Animal Health Network (AtAHN) in the Atlantic provinces.
- To connect with national surveillance activities through the Canadian Animal Health Surveillance System, including sharing information between national and regional sector groups, accessing technical and analytical support, and contributing to the further development of national surveillance infrastructure and standards.

## CORE ACTIVITIES

**Data to information:** Each quarter, core data, which includes data from provincial diagnostic labs (including selected AMR data), CIPARS, western region CgFARAD, provincial abattoirs, and clinical impressions surveys from species network practitioners will be synthesized and analyzed to generate animal health information. Where the data collation and analysis allows, a syndromic approach will be used. Information will be reviewed at quarterly network meetings, and the validated information will be used to identify emerging issues and research priorities, as well as shared more broadly.

**Surveillance:** Lead or support targeted surveillance activities identified as priorities through core data analysis and review.

**Intelligence gathering:** Bring together information generated by researchers, government, and industry (e.g. quality assurance data such as uptake of biosecurity practices) that has surveillance value, and integrate this with quarterly meeting information.

**Analyses:** Where applicable, conduct systematic evaluation, analysis and reporting on information received through surveillance activities led by WeCAHN.

**Knowledge translation and transfer (KTT):** Convert gathered intelligence to useful information for practitioners, producers and other stakeholders (e.g. reports, infographics, webinars, podcasts).

**Communication:** Identify practitioners' and producers' preferred delivery method for information. Make the aforementioned KTT available to practitioners, producers, public, and other stakeholders available via their preferred engagement platforms: WeCAHN website, e-blasts to WeCAHN listserv, social media posts (e.g. Twitter), or to other producer or veterinary association groups. Communication with western practitioners prior to quarterly network calls occur to inquire whether they have seen any novel/unusual cases, or whether there are other topics that may be of relevance to discuss during network meetings.

## SCOPE

WeCAHN's primary focus is on livestock and poultry health, zoonotic disease and veterinary public health issues. WeCAHN may, from time to time, collaborate with other organizations to support surveillance in non-focus areas, such as equine or companion animal health or other activities as recommended by the WeCAHN Advisory Committee.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

### Administration

Prairie Diagnostic Services (PDS) is champion and administrator for WeCAHN. PDS is signatory to funding applications and enters into funding agreements with each province and other funding bodies. PDS holds all funds received for and administers the WeCAHN finances. Normal, day-to-day decisions on operational expenses occur at the level of PDS and the WeCAHN Coordinator, with annual budget approval by the Steering Committee. Unbudgeted expenditures greater than \$2,500 require consultation with the Steering Committee prior to proceeding.

### Steering Committee

Operational oversight and strategic direction are provided by a steering committee (SC). The SC is responsible for:

- Providing strategic direction
- Determining resource allocation and funding for finalized activities that are presented to the SC for implementation
- Providing final approval for WeCAHN budgets, activities, and implementation plans
- Providing ongoing advocacy for animal health surveillance activities in Canada

## **Membership**

SC committee membership consists of a minimum of one representative from each of the four western provincial government's agriculture departments and one representative from PDS. Provinces/PDS may assign up to two members to the SC in order to provide adequate representation due to limited availability of one or more members; however, each province/PDS will have one vote each in matters require voting for decision making. Decisions are made by quorum agreement (minimum three members). The Canadian Animal Health Surveillance System (CAHSS) Coordinator is invited as an ex officio member of the SC. Additional ex officio members may be added to the SC with approval from the above described members; ex officio members do not have voting power.

The membership term is not limited in time. Should a member resign, that member's province/PDS will be asked to designate a new member from their organization.

## **Chair**

The committee will nominate a provincial/territorial representative to serve as Chair. The role of the Chair will be to facilitate meeting planning/coordination, to act as a liaison and to represent the views of the committee.

## **Decision making**

In most situations, SC decisions will be made on consensus. Should a situation arise where a consensus is not possible, a majority decision may be made. A quorum of at least three voting members is required for decisions. When voting/decision making occurs via email communication, a non-response to an emailed request will be considered as agreement.

## **Coordinator**

The WeCAHN coordinator is a contracted position, whose role is to lead the development and operation of WeCAHN species networks. The WeCAHN coordinator is responsible for:

- Providing support and coordination of WeCAHN that includes:
  - Overseeing compilation and dissemination of data for WeCAHN networks.
  - Overseeing maintenance and updates of WeCAHN social media presence and website.
  - Sharing information on synergies/opportunities to leverage across networks.
  - Providing leads with help as needed (e.g. ad hoc queries of laboratory data).

- Liaising with external labs/data sources and other provincial networks (OAHN, RAIZO).
- Building and maintaining ongoing connections and collaboration with various industry and professional groups.
- Organizing events for WeCAHN networks as needed.
- Identifies opportunities, brings recommendations and provides context to the Steering Committee.
- Budgetary responsibility (e.g. approving member payments, oversight of project billing administration).

## **Scientific Advisory Committee**

### **Expectations**

The scientific advisory committee (SAC) consists of animal health experts with interest in animal health surveillance in western Canada who have been invited to participate. Members may be added at any time, with the approval of the SC. The membership term is not limited in time.

The SAC will meet a minimum once per year, to review WeCAHN activities for the previous year and to make recommendations for upcoming activities. Other meetings may be convened as necessary to address specific issues that require SAC advice.

Each member of the SAC is expected to participate based on their field of expertise. We strive for a participatory and consensus building environment. The SAC is considered a public forum and members are cautioned to exercise discretion and good judgement in any communications related to the work of the committee. WeCAHN continues to evolve in a flexible environment. Any suggestions or improvements may be made as new information and/or technology become available. Where possible, expertise will be drawn from the western provinces, including but not limited to the two veterinary colleges, the animal health laboratories, veterinary organizations (e.g. provincial associations, Western Canadian Association of Swine Veterinarians, Western Canadian Association of Bovine Practitioners), sector stakeholders and the public sector (e.g. provincial government staff, area Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Public Health Agency of Canada staff).

## **Species (Expert) Networks**

### **Expert network composition:**

A network lead, or co-leads, will be established by participants at the first network meeting (e.g. first meeting of the beef network). The network lead will chair the WeCAHN meetings in most instances, and with support from the coordinator, will coordinate agendas and communication documents. Network membership will strive to include to include four private practitioners (one from each of the western provinces), a representative of each of the western veterinary diagnostic services laboratories,

a representative from each western veterinary college, and a representative from the Canadian Integrated Program for Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance (CIPARS). While a representative from each of the four provinces will be invited to attend quarterly expert network meetings, it is expected that one of the four may be designated to attend and convey information to/from the other three. Some networks may include industry representatives, or other additional experts.

### **Meetings:**

**Expert network meetings:** Expert networks will meet on a quarterly basis. Unless otherwise specified, most meetings will be held remotely via teleconference or video conference. The meetings will be scheduled on dates and times determined by the leadership with input on availability of members (typically by email or Doodle poll). Meeting summaries and any applicable documents presented at meetings may be posted on the WeCAHN website. Network members are expected to attend all WeCAHN network meetings. In their absence, a summary of any significant issues in their area (sector of industry/geographical area or area of expertise) should be forwarded to the lead or WeCAHN coordinator in lieu of attendance if possible.

**Meeting Guidelines:** Meetings are generally facilitated by the leads. The focus of the meetings will be to discuss current data presented, comparing with previous data, and discussing any health and welfare issues relevant to the industry. The findings and identified issues will then be focused upon actionable items and information dissemination. Expert network members are expected to engage in collegial, polite discourse in all forms of communication; to refrain from using the network meetings and communications to advance personal views outside of the network consensus; and to keep confidential and not disclose to others information discussed by the network.

### **Communications:**

The main output of the meetings will be a summary report, published in two versions: one targeting practitioners, and one targeting producers. This report will be disseminated via the WeCAHN website and social media platforms, and practitioner listservs where applicable, with the producer version also being made available at cooperating industry websites. Any further network activity arising from the quarterly call will be similarly communicated, as directed by the network.

### **Expectations of Expert Network Members:**

#### Responsibilities of all Members:

- Attend all WeCAHN expert network meetings. In the absence of attendance, a summary of issues and interpretation of the data presented sent to the co-lead via email or call is strongly encouraged.
- Encourage others in their circle of influence to participate in WeCAHN (e.g. via surveys, read reports etc.), and share WeCAHN communications and information products with colleagues.

In some cases, contribute to network reports by Members:

- Attend all WeCAHN expert network meetings. In the absence of meetings, other activities include writing articles, participating in podcasts, motivating others to complete surveys or other tasks as agreed upon with the network.
- Observe strict confidentiality within network discussions, publications, and communications.
- Interact with other members of expert network in a timely and courteous manner.
- Review documents provided in preparation for meetings and provide timely feedback to the WeCAHN leads on any reports or items for review.
- Request specific topics for discussion by contacting the leads and suggest other participants with expertise or interest in the topic to be included in the discussion.
- Discuss lab findings, case studies, clinical impressions and current industry animal health knowledge and experience.
- Identify risks, trends, research and extension needs.

Responsibilities of network leads: The leads provide guidance to the network to ensure it connects to the goals and objectives set out for WeCAHN.

- Lead the network meetings.
- Provide expertise.
- Plan meeting agendas and assign tasks to other network members and the WeCAHN coordinator as required.
- Collaborate with network members to analyse data and identify research opportunities around emerging issues, gaps, opportunities and trends, including idea generation for communication tools/social media posts.
- Provide input into, and assist in disseminating, surveys.
- Determine ways to increase interaction, engagement, and participation among network members, if required.
- Present and promote expert network activities at species sector - industry (e.g. AGM) and veterinary meetings.
- Identify and participate in learning opportunities and in decision making for any professional development offered to network members.
- Develop key performance indicators with the network members and WeCAHN Coordinator for his/her species network.
- Be able to run the technology for the network calls if needed.
- Approve any information sent to the network that did not originate from one of the participating members.

Responsibilities of the Veterinary College Network Members: The veterinary college network members provide expertise, perspective and surveillance information from the colleges.

- Provide updates to the network leads on interesting cases and recent research at colleges or elsewhere.

- Participate in calls to provide a research or specialist perspective on topics relevant to the network as requested by the leads. Provide guidance and possibly lead proposals/research analysis for surveillance projects.
- Provide input on and assist with network communication products as requested. Attend network teleconferences/meetings and actively contribute.

Responsibilities of the laboratory network members: The laboratory network members provide expertise and perspective as a pathologist at the provincial animal health laboratories.

- Contribute to the laboratory update on the network calls including any interesting cases, diagnostic tips, issues of concern while providing diagnostic expertise.
- Compile, validate, and summarize laboratory data as requested and send to the WeCAHN coordinator/leads in a timely fashion.
- Assist with network-initiated surveillance projects and network communication products as needed.
- Conduct diagnostic investigations.
- Attend network teleconference/meetings and actively contribute.