



WEST AFRICAN HEALTH ORGANISATION  
ORGANISATION OUEST AFRICAINE DE LA SANTE  
ORGANIZAÇÃO OESTE AFRICANA DA SAÚDE



## PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 23 March 2026

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# SIERRA LEONE TO HOST THE 27TH ASSEMBLY OF HEALTH MINISTERS OF ECOWAS FROM 20–25 APRIL 2026 IN FREETOWN



Health Ministers from the Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) will convene in Freetown, Republic of Sierra Leone, from 20 to 25 April 2026 for the 27th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Health Ministers (AHM) of ECOWAS, a high-level regional meeting organised under the theme: *“Advancing Malaria Elimination through an Integrated Regional Strategy.”*

Organised by the West African Health Organisation (WAHO), the specialised institution of ECOWAS responsible for health issues, the Assembly represents the highest regional political platform for guiding health cooperation within the Community. It provides Ministers of Health with a strategic forum to review progress made by Member States and regional institutions, strengthen regional collaboration, and adopt key decisions and resolutions aimed at improving the health and well-being of the populations of West Africa.

The 2026 AHM will place particular emphasis on **the fight against malaria**, which remains one of the most pressing public health challenges across the ECOWAS region. **Each year, the region records more**



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than 112 million malaria cases and over 310,000 deaths, disproportionately affecting children under five and pregnant women.

- **STRATEGIC MEETINGS TO BE HELD ALONGSIDE THE ASSEMBLY**

Several high-level regional events will take place alongside the Assembly in order to enrich ministerial discussions and address other critical health priorities in the region.

A **Regional Meeting on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health**, entitled “**Translating Research Findings into Action**”, will be held on **17–18 April 2026**. This side event will provide a platform for policymakers, researchers, technical partners and national programmes to present recent research findings and discuss practical strategies for translating evidence into effective policies and interventions. The workshop aims to strengthen the use of evidence-based approaches to improve adolescent sexual and reproductive health programmes across the ECOWAS region.

In addition, the **Regional Dialogue on Health Financing in West Africa** will take place in **Freetown on 20–21 April 2026**, under the theme: “**Advancing Sustainable, Equitable, and Resilient Health Financing for Universal Health Coverage in ECOWAS.**”

This high-level dialogue will bring together policymakers, regional institutions and technical and financial partners to discuss priority reforms in health financing. It aims to strengthen domestic resource mobilisation, promote more equitable and resilient financing mechanisms, and accelerate progress towards **Universal Health Coverage (UHC)** across the ECOWAS region.

The Assembly will also coincide with **World Malaria Day on 25 April**, providing an important opportunity to reinforce political commitment and regional mobilisation to accelerate malaria elimination efforts.

- **SCHEDULE OF STATUTORY MEETINGS**

The statutory meetings of the 27th Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS will take place according to the following schedule:

- **20 April 2026:** Meeting of WAHO Liaison Officers
- **21–22 April 2026:** Meeting of the ECOWAS Health Experts Committee
- **22–23 April 2026:** WAHO Partners’ Forum
- **24–25 April 2026:** Ministerial Session of the Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS



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**His Excellency Dr Austin DEMBY, Minister of Health of the Republic of Sierra Leone**, welcomed the organisation of the 27th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS in his country and highlighted its strategic importance for the region.

***“Sierra Leone is honoured to host the 27th Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS. We hope this gathering will be more than a conference; it should serve as a platform for concrete commitments and coordinated actions to sustainably improve the health of West African populations,”*** the Minister stated.

Dr DEMBY further emphasised that his country intends to use the event as an opportunity to strengthen regional health cooperation, promote evidence-based policymaking, and accelerate the implementation of high-impact interventions, particularly in maternal and child health and the fight against communicable diseases.

For his part, the **Director General of the West African Health Organisation, Dr Melchior Athanase J. C. AÏSSI**, underscored the significance of the meeting for the future of public health in West Africa.



***“The Assembly of Health Ministers represents the highest political decision-making and strategic guidance body for health within the ECOWAS region. It offers Member States a unique opportunity to reinforce their collective commitment, mobilise resources, and accelerate progress towards more resilient and equitable health systems for the benefit of the people of West Africa,”*** he said.

Dr AÏSSI also recalled that regional cooperation remains essential to addressing cross-border health challenges, including epidemic-prone diseases, the health impacts of climate change, and the growing need for sustainable health financing.

The 27th Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS is expected to mark an important step in strengthening regional mobilisation to accelerate malaria elimination in West Africa, through the adoption of strategic orientations aimed at reinforcing prevention interventions, strengthening epidemiological surveillance, promoting innovation, and ensuring sustainable financing for malaria control programmes.

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### Notes to Editors

The Assembly of Health Ministers of ECOWAS is the regional political body responsible for guiding health policies and strengthening coordination among Member States in addressing priority public health challenges.

Decisions adopted during the Assembly provide strategic direction for regional health policies and contribute to mobilising resources and partnerships needed to strengthen health systems across the ECOWAS region.

The 2026 session will take place in Freetown, Sierra Leone, from 20 to 25 April 2026, and is expected to bring together several hundred participants from governments, regional institutions, international organisations, technical and financial partners, and civil society.

### About the West African Health Organisation (WAHO)

The West African Health Organisation (WAHO) is the specialised institution of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) responsible for health issues. It works to harmonise health policies, strengthen health systems and promote regional cooperation in order to improve the health and well-being of the populations of West Africa.