



FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH PLANNING, RESEARCH AND STATISTICS

FEDERAL MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL WELFARE, NIGERIA

WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY – POSITION PAPER BY NIGERIA
AGENDA: Skin Diseases and Adverse Cosmetic Events (ACE)

1. Introduction

Skin diseases and adverse cosmetic events (ACE) resulting from unsafe cosmetic products represent a growing public health concern in Nigeria. Manifesting as chemical burns, dermatitis, infections, and systemic illnesses, these conditions disproportionately affect women and youth, with consequences for both individual health and the broader healthcare system. This position paper, aligned with Nigeria's advocacy at the World Health Assembly (WHA), urges the inclusion of skin diseases and ACE in global Universal Health Coverage (UHC) priorities and calls for strengthened global policy action.

2. Background and Context

Nigeria, in collaboration with Côte d'Ivoire, has consistently advocated for the recognition of skin diseases as a global public health priority. At the WHO Executive Board Meeting, both countries highlighted the importance of integrating skin conditions into broader discussions on communicable and neglected tropical diseases. While WHA resolutions—WHA72.2 (2019), WHA76.4 (2023), and WHA77.16 (2024)—do not explicitly cover ACE-related skin diseases, their focus on financial protection, diagnostics, and access to quality care remains highly relevant.

3. The Burden of ACE-Related Skin Diseases in Nigeria

The widespread use of unregulated skin-lightening and cosmetic products has fueled a surge in ACE-related conditions in Nigeria. A national opinion poll conducted by the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (FMHSW) revealed that **52% of manufacturers** include skin-lightening agents in their products. Alarming findings from WHO and national dermatology bodies indicate that **77% of Nigerian women** use skin-lightening products—many containing mercury, hydroquinone, or corticosteroids—substances linked to:

- Chronic dermatitis
- Pigmentation disorders
- Opportunistic skin infections
- Systemic toxicities such as diabetes, hypertension, and renal disease

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A study on adverse drug reactions (ADRs) in Nigerian hospitals estimated a **treatment cost of ₦161,668.00 (\$1,243.60)** per patient, highlighting the financial burden these conditions impose. While ACEs are distinct from ADRs, similar cost implications are likely, including extended hospitalizations and resource-intensive care.

4. Gaps and Regulatory Challenges

Despite some progress, the following gaps impede effective ACE prevention and control:

- **Insufficient regulatory oversight:** Cosmetic products are not regulated under pharmacovigilance systems applied to medicines.
- **Proliferation of falsified products:** Substandard and unapproved cosmetic products continue to circulate widely.
- **Limited public awareness:** Consumers remain largely unaware of the dangers of unregulated cosmetic products, particularly those marketed for skin-lightening.

5. Actions Taken

Nigeria has initiated several key interventions through the **Cosmetics Safety Management Programme (CSMP)**:

- **Sensitization campaigns** in selected states, with plans to expand to grassroots communities.
- **Development of a National Cosmetics Policy**, offering a regulatory roadmap to ensure product safety.
- **Creation of national guidelines** for safety assessments of cosmetic products.
- **Institutional development** within the FMHSW, including targeted training for health workers and manufacturers.

6. Recommendations and Strategic Priorities

Nigeria calls on WHO Member States and partners to support the following action areas:

1. **Integration of ACE into Surveillance and Reporting Systems**
 - Establish a **National ACE Reporting System** within NAFDAC and DFDS
 - Leverage WHO's pharmacovigilance framework
 - Mandate ACE reporting by healthcare providers and manufacturers
2. **Public Awareness and Consumer Protection Campaigns**
 - Implement a **nationwide multimedia campaign** on the risks of hazardous cosmetic products
 - Partner with WHO and national dermatology bodies to promote safe skincare and informed product use
3. **International Policy and Regulatory Alignment**
 - Advocate for WHA resolutions that explicitly address **cosmetic safety and ACE-related health risks**
 - Collaborate with regional bodies like the **AU and ECOWAS** to develop harmonized regulatory standards
 - Encourage global investment in research on the **health effects of cosmetic products**

7. Conclusion

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Nigeria urges WHO and its Member States to formally recognize skin diseases and ACE as a **global health priority** and to integrate them into the UHC and essential health services agenda. A coordinated global approach—anchored in surveillance, regulation, and public education—is essential to mitigate the public health impact of cosmetic-related skin diseases.