

**Summary report by the Chairperson of the sixty-eighth session  
of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific:  
*Ms Glenys Beauchamp, Secretary*  
*Australian Government Department of Health***

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**PART 1: TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION**

**Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005)**

The Regional Committee sought assurances that the proposed five-year global strategic plan would be consistent with regional health security efforts, mainly the *Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies* (APSED III). The Regional Committee also expressed concern that the global strategic plan be implemented flexibly, in a manner adapted to the Pacific context and to national health security priorities. APSED III is the product of two updates that have incorporated more than a decade of health security lessons, not only from the disaster- and outbreak-prone Western Pacific Region, but also global experiences such as Ebola. The global strategic plan has already been aligned with APSED III, which enables Member States to refer to both instruments for guidance when developing their national plans for International Health Regulations, or IHR (2005), implementation without encountering discrepancies or inconsistencies between the two instruments. Subsequent drafts of the global strategic plan should be monitored to ensure that duplication of effort is avoided and to limit the reporting obligations on Member States. The final draft should be disseminated in advance to allow for adequate Member State consultation.

Some areas in which the draft could potentially be developed include: greater emphasis on the importance of integrating the animal health sector into public health preparedness and response efforts; the need to strengthen the role of IHR national focal points through technical guidance and training; the need for self-assessment tools accompanied by clear guidance and a consultation mechanism; and consideration of novel approaches to collective action, especially in small countries or small island states, and the formalization of such approaches in technical fields, such as laboratory capacity. The Regional Committee proposed clarification of the working targets and the relationship between the three pillars and the six proposed areas of action, and suggested that some of the guiding principles could be more clearly articulated.

The monitoring and evaluation component of APSED III promotes accountability and learning through stakeholder review and progress reporting, including the annual Technical Advisory Group meeting. The four components of the IHR (2005) Monitoring and Evaluation Framework are embedded in APSED III: annual reports, after-action reviews, exercises and joint external evaluations (JEEs). Monitoring and evaluation, now including JEEs, has been an integral part of the APSED approach in the Region since 2010. As of October 2017, the Regional Office for the

Western Pacific had supported five Member States to complete JEEs: Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia and Viet Nam. Australia will conduct a JEE in November, and six more JEEs are scheduled in the Region for 2018.

Member States develop or update national action plans using APSED III as a guiding framework to implement strategic recommendations from the JEE. The WHO Health Emergencies (WHE) programme adds to the Region's strong momentum towards regional and global health security. The regional WHE team is now part of the One WHO structure for building operational capacities and capabilities for more effective response to outbreaks and emergencies.

## **Global vector control and response**

The Regional Committee confirmed the global vector control and response approach in the ongoing implementation of regional action plans endorsed last year to combat malaria and dengue. Member States also requested that an item on neglected tropical diseases be included on the agenda of the sixty-ninth session of the Regional Committee in 2018 in the context of implementing the global vector control strategy.

## **PART 2: TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE**

### **Measles and rubella elimination**

While the Western Pacific Region achieved historically low measles incidence in 2012, a Region-wide measles resurgence occurred from 2013 to 2016. The outbreaks revealed challenges that previous approaches had not anticipated. In addition, a higher proportion of rubella cases has been reported recently among adolescents and young adults, leading to increased risk of congenital rubella syndrome. In response to these emerging challenges, the Regional Office for the Western Pacific worked with Member States and experts to develop the *Measles and Rubella Elimination in the Western Pacific: Regional Strategy and Plan of Action*, which updates the 2014 regional vaccine action plan and offers additional guidance for rubella elimination.

The Regional Strategy and Plan of Action recognizes the need for flexibility and integration in dealing with different Member State contexts and issues. To address the concerns of many Pacific island countries and areas with small populations, for example, the draft Regional Strategy and Plan of Action approaches the Pacific as a block for verification. Also, the outbreak component of the Regional Strategy and Plan of Action is aligned with the surveillance and detection mechanisms of APSED III.

The Regional Committee endorsed *Measles and Rubella Elimination in the Western Pacific: Regional Strategy and Plan of Action* (WPR/RC68.R1).

### **Protecting Children from the Harmful Impact of Food Marketing**

Member States have expressed concerns about increasing rates of childhood overweight, obesity and malnutrition in some parts of the Region, and the harmful impact of food marketing on child health in general. In the Western Pacific Region, strong economic growth and trade liberalization have made processed foods of low nutritional value cheaper and more available, while increased marketing has made them more attractive. A World Health Assembly resolution seeking to limit marketing of breast-milk substitutes and other actions aimed at curbing consumption of unhealthy foods have had little net effect in the Region.

Against this backdrop, last year Member States requested an analysis of the impact of marketing of foods to children and inclusion of the issue on the agenda of the Regional Committee. Member States thanked the Secretariat for the informative analysis and report, which outlined efforts underway and presented options to restrict marketing of unhealthy foods to children, as a prelude to the development of a regional plan of action on the issue. Member States added that such a plan should take into account important stakeholders and considerable differences in approaches and contexts across the Region.

The Regional Committee endorsed a resolution calling on the Secretariat to develop a regional plan of action on protecting children from the harmful impact of food marketing (WPR/RC68.R3).

## **Health promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals**

Given the driving role of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in health and development, the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific last year endorsed the *Regional Action Agenda on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Western Pacific*. Since that time, Member States have focused on the potential of health promotion as a tool to address the broad determinants of health, which is key to achieving SDG health targets. This is due to the ability of health promotion to influence lifestyles by reaching all sectors and people's daily settings.

The *Regional Action Plan on Health Promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals 2018–2030* aims to mainstream and accelerate practices to strengthen health promotion, including health literacy. This builds on innovations, experiences and best practices that have already been incorporated into the Region's health promotion approach, including outcomes of the Ninth Global Conference on Health Promotion in Shanghai in November 2016, and the ongoing implementation of regional action plans on urban health, healthy and resilient cities, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Regional Committee endorsed the *Regional Action Plan on Health Promotion in the Sustainable Development Goals 2018–2030* (WPR/RC68.R4).

## **Transitioning to integrated financing of priority public health services**

Member States in the Western Pacific Region have requested guidance in their efforts to improve the sustainability of financing and the efficiency of health systems, as support decreases from long-term external donors. Even many countries that do not depend on donors are experiencing financing shortfalls due to budgeting and service delivery reforms at the national level. These shortfalls present serious challenges as countries attempt to ensure the viability of the essential public health functions that underpin health systems. Specific challenges range from insufficient coordination and harmonization between priority public health services and the general health system to insufficient domestic financing for health and weak governance of the transition process.

In order to help Member States meet these challenges, WHO developed the *Regional Framework for Action on Transitioning to Integrated Financing of Priority Public Health Services in the Western Pacific*, in consultation with country, regional and technical experts. Member States expressed approval of the Framework's whole-of-system approach to secure essential public health functions and ensure the sustainability and resilience of the health system. They said that

this approach is relevant not only to countries transitioning away from donor support but also for countries facing other budgetary issues.

The Regional Committee endorsed the *Regional Framework for Action on Transitioning to Integrated Financing of Priority Public Health Services in the Western Pacific* (WPR/RC68.R5).

## **Triple elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis**

Member States expressed concern over children born with HIV, hepatitis B and syphilis in the Region, despite the fact that mother-to-child transmission of these infections can be prevented by simple interventions. Experiences from Member States confirm that better coordination among programmes will make interventions more accessible for women, children and their families and result in more efficient and effective use of resources for maternal, newborn and child health services.

The *Regional Framework for the Triple Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV, Hepatitis B and Syphilis in Asia and the Pacific 2018–2030* will improve coordination among existing programmes and build on or incorporate existing regional and global strategies and targets. These include the interlinked global health sector strategies on HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections, as well as regional action plans for healthy newborn infants and viral hepatitis that continue to deliver momentous achievements. The Framework also responds to the call for greater integration and coordination to improve the efficiency and sustainable financing of priority public health services.

The Regional Committee endorsed the *Regional Framework for the Triple Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV, Hepatitis B and Syphilis in Asia and the Pacific 2018–2030* (WPR/RC68.R2).

## **Regulatory strengthening and convergence for medicines and health workforce**

The regulatory landscape for medicines and the health workforce varies across the Western Pacific Region. Some Member States have highly functional regulatory systems while others have relatively weak systems or no formal regulations, resulting in wide differences in the degree and level of protection for populations. Regulatory convergence and cooperation have been recognized as mechanisms that Member States can employ to ensure the quality and safety of health services, protect public welfare and help achieve universal health coverage. Such an approach can reduce the burden on individual countries, extend the beneficial reach of regulations beyond borders and drive continuous improvement of national regulatory systems.

The *Western Pacific Regional Action Agenda on Regulatory Strengthening, Convergence and Cooperation for Medicines and the Health Workforce* was developed in response to Member

States requests to strengthen regulatory systems at the national level and across national borders. The Regional Action Agenda provides guidance to Member States for productive participation in global, regional and bilateral cooperation and convergence initiatives while ensuring sensitivity to country context and sovereignty. Member States expressed appreciation that individual concerns – such as the challenges small island states face or the role of traditional medicine – were addressed.

The Regional Committee endorsed the *Western Pacific Regional Action Agenda on Regulatory Strengthening, Convergence and Cooperation for Medicines and the Health Workforce* (WPR/RC68.R7).

## **Food Safety**

The Regional Committee reviewed the *Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015* and recognized the changing context of food safety and the complex challenges those changes have created for food safety risk management. Extensive consultations with Member States, experts and partners led to a fresh approach to strengthen national food safety systems and better ways to manage emerging food safety issues.

The resulting *Regional Framework for Action on Food Safety in the Western Pacific* was well received by representatives at the Regional Committee. The new Framework presents a robust technical guide that addresses emerging food safety issues that can be implemented at the country and regional levels. The Framework builds on the achievements and lessons learnt from the 2011–2015 strategy, but goes further by providing a risk-based approach to managing food safety. The new Framework recognizes that Member States are at different stages of development, and thus, calls for advancing food safety systems in a stepwise manner in alignment with existing health security safeguards. Pacific island countries and areas welcomed the fact that the Framework takes into account the unique food safety challenges they face.

The Regional Committee endorsed the *Regional Framework for Action on Food Safety in the Western Pacific* (WPR/RC68.R6).