

Key facts

Legal frameworks are needed to cover core areas of public health. These include **organization of health systems, protection of rights, ensuring access to quality and safe health services, preventing and managing public health risk, and addressing social determinants of health.**

Effective legal frameworks require **sound processes for the development of law, its implementation and evaluation.**

Everyone in health has a role to play in using legal frameworks effectively, including policy-makers, regulators, parliamentarians, health workers and communities.

Legal frameworks—both the instruments of law and the institutions responsible for putting them into effect—are **essential to advance universal health coverage (UHC) and achieve health in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. They are critical to organising and regulating health systems and services, protecting rights, and preventing and managing public health risks. However, in many countries, legal frameworks are out of date, have been developed in a reactive fashion, are not coherent or consistent with existing evidence and the relevant country context, and/or are not consistently implemented and enforced. More attention is needed on the processes to design, implement and review legal frameworks effectively to promote and protect public health, as well as the capacities of stakeholders to improve those processes.

How to strengthen legal frameworks to advance UHC and health in the SDGs will depend on the context of the particular country. Countries in the Region are highly varied in terms of health needs and priorities, as well as in their legal systems and traditions, and political, economic, social, cultural and historical circumstance. While specific priorities will vary across countries, there are certain core areas of public health in which modern legal frameworks are needed to advance health in the SDGs.

WHO response

Strengthening legal frameworks for health is not just a matter for lawyers, but rather an integral part of the work of all in public health. The importance of legal frameworks is recognized in the *Universal Health Coverage: Moving Towards Better Health – Action Framework for the Western Pacific Region*¹ and the *Regional Action Agenda on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Western Pacific*.² The *Western Pacific Regional Action Agenda on Strengthening Legal Frameworks for Health in the Sustainable Development Goals* builds on these existing agendas and presents guidance on legal options and strategies that countries may consider. Countries and WHO have complementary roles and commitments in the development of legal frameworks to support the pursuit of better health for all.

Specifically, WHO is:

- **Raising awareness** on the importance of the law for health and development and the place of a knowledgeable and skilled legal and regulatory workforce within public health.
- **Providing technical support** to countries to develop systems for legislative development, review and implementation.
- **Facilitating dialogue and cooperation** between countries to strengthen legal frameworks in relation to cross-border health issues, opportunities for regional approaches and joint advocacy.
- **Facilitating the sharing of information and expertise** in relation to legal frameworks for health.

¹Available at <http://iris.wpro.who.int/handle/10665.1/13371>.

²Available at <http://iris.wpro.who.int/handle/10665.1/13553>.

