

# Summary report from the Honourable Francisco Duque III, Secretary of Health of the Philippines and Chairperson of the seventy-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific

WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, Manila, Philippines – 6 to 9 October 2020

## PART 1. TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

- **WHO transformation**

While the Regional Committee appreciated the draft report, *Transforming for enhanced country impact*, several revisions were proposed to strengthen the draft. Given the impact of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), there was a request to update the report on the transformation and how recommendations from the evaluation of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response would be integrated into the WHO transformation. WHO also was encouraged to continue to address gaps in the implementation of its transformation efforts, which will further assist the Organization in delivering on expectations to work in a faster, more innovative and coordinated manner. Further information was requested to be included in the draft report on the proposed evaluation of the transformation agenda. Information on how further transformation work will be prioritized, including processes and timelines, would also be welcomed.

- **Development of a draft global patient safety action plan**

During the Regional Committee discussion on safe and affordable surgery, many Member States referenced the importance of patient safety and their commitment to continue to prioritize it as part of health system transformation.

- **Development of the Programme Budget 2022–2023**

The Regional Committee acknowledged the inevitable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of the proposed Programme Budget 2022–2023 and supported the approach proposed. Recommendations from the discussion included: ensuring the budget development process continued to be transparent and driven by consideration of Member State needs and priorities, including during the midterm revision process; maintaining critical programmes related to universal health coverage (UHC) including immunizations against vaccine-preventable diseases (VPDs) and noncommunicable diseases, despite the COVID-19 crisis; establishing priorities among programme areas when allocating additional budget space; and ensuring accountability and transparency in implementation, particularly in relation to COVID-19. It was requested that the Secretariat provide: further analysis of emerging needs, including the additional global public health goods introduced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic; further information as to how potential additional budget elements (emerging and existing changes triggered by the emergence of COVID-19 and the WHO transformation and polio transition) could be accommodated within the projected budget increase; and updates on the implementation of the *Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023, Results Framework*, including how the Framework might be revised incorporating lessons learnt from the pandemic. Member State representatives awaited more detailed information on opportunities to be consulted on the development of the programme budget.

## PART 2: TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

- **COVID-19 in the Region**

The Secretariat presented an update on the COVID-19 pandemic, with several Member States appreciating the scope of WHO support for challenges ranging from emergency response and border control to community engagement and strengthening essential health services. Member States agreed that capacity-building conducted in the Region for more than a decade under the *Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies* – now in its third iteration as APSEDIII – had been essential to their efforts to control COVID-19 outbreaks, with the Western Pacific currently among the WHO regions with the lowest rates of infection. They also expressed appreciation for the Regional Director’s leadership during the pandemic and noted that the thematic priorities and operational shifts set out in the *For the Future: Towards the Healthiest and Safest Region*, the shared vision for WHO’s work in the Region, had proven invaluable in responding to the pandemic. The Regional Director noted that the pandemic had reinforced the importance of the *For the Future* vision, by amplifying the challenges facing health systems in the future. Accordingly, several representatives concurred that the pandemic had served as a reminder of the need to continue investing in resilient health systems and UHC. The Regional Director assured Member States that key work would continue on other regional priorities, despite the demands of the pandemic. He also expressed a wish that the Region’s characteristic solidarity, along with the values of humility, compassion and support for the vulnerable, should continue to guide the Region’s efforts to navigate through the COVID-19 era – as Member States and WHO work together to actively create the "new normal" and build a better future.

- **Implementing *For the Future***

*For the Future: Towards the Healthiest and Safest Region* is the Region’s shared five-year vision of WHO’s work with Member States and partners, and the Region’s implementation plan for the WHO *Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023*. It reflects common challenges arising from the unique demographic, economic, social and geographic characteristics of the Region and articulates a common vision of acting today to address the challenges of tomorrow. After unanimously endorsing *For the Future* in 2019, Member States this year reaffirmed their support and urged WHO to remain committed to driving forward the vision during the COVID-19 pandemic. Member States noted the value of *For the Future* on issues ranging from identifying priorities for the development of the Programme Budget 2022–2023 to initiatives within the three main technical agenda items (below). For example, representatives variously cited the “ground up” approach, strategic communications and "backcasting" as particularly useful in fostering innovative approaches, such as those in the endorsed Action Plan on healthy ageing (below). Member States were supportive of *For the Future* continuing to be the guiding force as WHO and Member States work together to make the Region the healthiest and safest in the world.

- **Vaccine-preventable diseases and immunization**

The Regional Committee in resolution WPR/RC71.R1 endorsed the *Regional Strategic Framework for Vaccine-preventable Diseases and Immunization in the Western Pacific (2021–2030)*. Member States praised the Framework for its timely and valuable guidance on strengthening national immunization programmes and strategies that could help achieve the collective goals of the *Immunization Agenda 2030*, UHC and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Member State representatives said the COVID-19 pandemic had made WHO support to fight VPDs and strengthen immunization programmes in the Region even more urgent. Many Member State delegations cited the thematic priorities contained in *For the Future*, specifically its priority of reaching the unreached, as crucial to strengthening health systems to achieve UHC. Delegations appreciated the Framework’s push to expand the benefits of vaccines beyond early childhood to protect people throughout the life course – as part of a systems approach – and pledged to work with WHO towards the goal of a Western

Pacific Region free of morbidity, mortality and disability from VPDs by 2030. While the Framework does not cover vaccines under development, several Member States did express a desire to have WHO play a leading role in ensuring the equitable and transparent delivery in the Region of vaccines for COVID-19 once developed.

- **Safe and affordable surgery**

The Regional Committee in resolution WPR/RC71.R2 endorsed the *Action Framework for Safe and Affordable Surgery in the Western Pacific Region (2021–2030)*. Member States universally welcomed the Framework as a useful tool that would improve patient safety and advance the Region’s achievement of UHC and the SDGs. The Framework’s four proposed operational shifts, which are aligned with *For the Future*, were praised as a way to improve access to safe and affordable surgery that was consistent with national plans and strategies. Several Member State representatives noted that the issue was not just about surgery, but rather transforming entire health systems – through an evolving discussion on what constitutes essential health services, informed by “grounds up” priorities in each country. Member States appreciated that the Framework recognized that this could only be achieved by engaging multiple stakeholders. Improving surgical services also provided wider benefits of strengthened infection prevention and control and strengthened patient safety. Reflecting a long-standing tradition of regional cooperation, several representatives from countries with health systems that are already aligned with many of the recommendations in the Framework offered to share experiences and expertise with neighbouring countries. Several representatives noted that the COVID-19 pandemic provided important lessons, including the utility of telemedicine and the importance of improving health-care information technology systems, while serving as a reminder to refocus on vulnerable and marginalized groups.

- **Ageing and health**

The Regional Committee in resolution WPR/RC71.R3 endorsed the *Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific*. Member State representatives expressed broad support for the Regional Action Plan, noting the urgent need to prepare for population ageing and an accompanying shift in the burden of disease. Even Member States with relatively young populations said that rapid demographic shifts made it imperative to take early action. Member State representatives welcomed opportunities to learn from countries with more experience with ageing populations. They particularly appreciated the Action Plan's promotion of whole-of-government and whole-of-society solutions, and the importance of transforming health systems and social services towards meeting lifelong health needs, including strengthening community-based integrated care and services such as primary health care and mental health. Member States also highlighted the essential role of caregivers and communities and appreciated the Action Plan’s recommendation to leverage and strengthen the Region’s culture of caring for family and community members by promoting self-care and supporting caregivers and communities. Several Member State representatives said the COVID-19 pandemic made the Action Plan even more relevant and timely, as countries worked to protect older people at higher risk for the disease.

**Submitted by:**

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**Date**