

# Summary report from the Honourable Isaia Vaipuna Taape, Minister of Health (Tuvalu) and Vice-Chairperson of the seventy-second session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific

Himeji, Japan (hybrid session) – 25 to 29 October 2021

## PART 1. TOPICS FOR GLOBAL DISCUSSION

- **Sustainable financing**

During discussions at the seventy-second session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, Member States expressed strong support for the goal of sustainable financing for WHO – agreeing on the critical importance of sustainable financing for WHO’s ability to deliver on its mandate, including addressing the thematic priorities of [For the Future: Towards the Healthiest and Safest Region](#), the shared vision for health in the Western Pacific and the Region’s implementation plan for the WHO *Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023* (GPW 13). Member States expressed their appreciation for the work of the Working Group on Sustainable Financing and thanked the Chair and the Vice-Chair (from Australia), as well as Member States that had contributed to the constructive deliberations of the Working Group to date. In discussing sustainable financing in the context of WHO’s work in countries, Member States agreed that sustainable financing is a critical enabler for WHO to provide tailored support and deliver results at country level – in keeping with the Region’s long-standing practice of putting “countries at the centre”. On the questions posed by the Working Group, Member States expressed broad support for increasing assessed contributions (AC) to fund a higher proportion of the base segment of the WHO programme budget, with several specifying that AC should make up 50% of the base segment. Some delegations emphasized that any increase must be incremental; several emphasized that any benefits from increased sustainable financing must be equitably shared. Overall, Member States were open to further exploration of alternative financing mechanisms such as a replenishment model. Some Member States requested more detail related to a potential increase in AC and highlighted the importance of any increase being linked to reforms to improve governance, accountability and transparency.

- **Programme Budget 2022–2023**

The Secretariat provided an update on the Programme Budget 2022–2023, for which planning in the Western Pacific began with consultations between the Regional Office and Member States to identify country priorities, which were mapped to the *For the Future* thematic priorities. Member States appreciated that this would enable workplan implementation in the Region to begin in January 2022, ensuring WHO remained operationally effective. Citing the pandemic, Member State representatives emphasized the importance of ensuring flexibility to respond to changing country contexts in delivering on the budget’s core functions, while continuing to support health system transformation. The Regional Office was encouraged to maintain support for emergency preparedness and improve data stewardship. The Director, Planning, Resource Coordination and Performance Monitoring, WHO headquarters, also addressed the Regional Committee regarding implementation of resolution WHA74.3 and the pending revision of the Programme Budget 2022–2023, based on recommendations from the

Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response and other sources, as well as lessons from the pandemic.

- **Update on the work of the Working Group on Strengthening WHO Preparedness for and Response to Health Emergencies**

The two Co-Chairs and the Region's Vice-Chair (Singapore) of the Working Group on Strengthening WHO Preparedness for and Response to Health Emergencies updated the Regional Committee on Working Group activities. Member States suggested that the draft report for the special session of the World Health Assembly should be further discussed beyond official meetings to reach a firm consensus. More information on the drafting process was also requested. The importance of building consensus not only among Member States but also with other stakeholders was stressed, as governments alone cannot implement such wide-ranging preparedness and response measures. Responding to a question regarding a Working Group proposal that regional directors be empowered to issue regional-level intermediate health alerts, the Regional Director explained that the Western Pacific had an event monitoring system in place that allowed for rapid verification of reported incidents at regional, national and subnational levels, adding that all three levels of WHO should be similarly interconnected in the global alert system because pathogens do not respect national or regional borders.

- **Topics which may have been discussed in relation to global strategies/action plans and for which regional input is required**

- **Reducing the burden of noncommunicable diseases through strengthening prevention and control of diabetes:** Member States reported progress in strengthening noncommunicable disease (NCD) prevention and control and protecting children from the harmful impact of food marketing, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. The Secretariat is currently developing a regional framework on NCDs to support Member States in addressing common risk factors and improving NCD management in order to prevent chronic disease, disability and premature death. A number of representatives expressed support for a new regional framework, emphasizing support for innovation in primary and secondary prevention.
- **Social determinants of health:** During the panel discussion on the future of primary health care, the social determinants of health were raised as an important reason to embed primary health care in local communities – because primary health care has a fundamental role in addressing inequities. Member States referenced the importance of addressing social determinants during several other discussions, including on NCDs and reaching the unreached.
- **Strengthening efforts on food safety:** The Secretariat was working with Member States and partners to strengthen national food safety systems through implementation of the *Regional Framework for Action on Food Safety in the Western Pacific*. Representatives outlined steps taken in their countries to establish food safety regulation and alert systems.

## PART 2. TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

- **COVID-19 in the Region**

The impact of the pandemic on a range of other health issues and priorities and WHO's work more generally was discussed, as well as the opportunities it afforded for advancing commitment and action on public health and health system transformation. Member States appreciated that decades of investment in preparedness and response capacities – guided by the *Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies* (APSED) and its earlier iterations – had positioned the Western Pacific to fare comparatively well in combating COVID-19, while the promotion of the APSED “learn-and-improve” approach will continue to be essential as the Region worked to manage risks to be able to open up societies and economies towards a “new normal”. Appreciation was expressed for the work of the COVID-19 Vaccines Incident Management Support Team at the Regional Office and the support for countries and areas to access sufficient vaccine supplies to inoculate priority groups. Member States generally agreed on: the need for the effective and equitable use of vaccines; the continued application of public health and social measures, calibrated to country contexts; expanding health system capacity; early detection and targeted responses to COVID-19 flare-ups; and a risk-based approach to international border controls. In addition, Member States expressed appreciation for the *one team* approach in which the Regional Office, country offices and partners worked as one to provide tailored support to Member States, including technical assistance and guidance on emerging issues, as well as the deployment of experts and essential supplies. Under this item, briefings were also given on the Working Group on Strengthening WHO Preparedness for and Response to Health Emergencies (see above) and the new WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence.

- **Implementing *For the Future***

*For the Future: Towards the Healthiest and Safest Region* was adopted unanimously by Member States in October 2019. Representatives reaffirmed that the *For the Future* vision and principle of acting today to address the challenges of tomorrow had become even more relevant during the pandemic. Stressing the strength of collaboration, partnership and solidarity, representatives appreciated the tailored *one team* support that helped to advance implementation of GPW 13 through the Region's thematic priorities while responding to the pandemic. Representatives also said the *For the Future* operational shifts – or new ways of working – had proven useful, especially for planning NCD prevention and control efforts and promoting healthy ageing. The regional vision also was cited as instrumental in confronting climate change, the environment and health, issues on which Member States called for greater regional cooperation, as well as for the thematic priority of reaching the unreached with health-care services. *For the Future* discussions will continue to inform the Secretariat as it continues to work closely with Member States and partners achieve the ambitious vision for the Region.

- **Primary health care**

The Regional Committee held a panel discussion on the future of primary health care in the Region, with interventions by the health ministers of Singapore, Tonga and Vanuatu, and the associate health minister of New Zealand. Speakers described how their governments were putting primary health care at the centre of national health plans and discussed issues such as the shift away from acute care-based systems, engagement and inclusion of indigenous

leaders, and embedding primary health care in local communities. The Regional Director invited representatives to share experiences and ideas for building the primary health care of the future, sparking a rich and inclusive discussion that covered the adaptation of delivery models, the expansion of measures put in place for the pandemic, the importance of a well-trained health workforce, linkages with other sectors and equitable, people-centred care.

- **School health**

The Regional Committee adopted a resolution<sup>1</sup> on school health, which among other actions endorsed the *Regional Framework on Nurturing Resilient and Healthy Future Generations in the Western Pacific*. Member State representatives welcomed the “fresh and forward-looking” approach set out in the Framework and requested the Secretariat to provide tailored support to implement the Framework in accordance with their diverse country contexts. Representatives also emphasized the need for partnerships with other stakeholders to optimize implementation. The Secretariat committed to supporting Member States in implementation at all levels and thanked Member States for their constructive advice on the implementation approach. The Framework’s emphasis on schools as “incubators” for health resonated with representatives who cited the potential for entrenching healthy behaviours through schools to prevent NCDs and other health conditions later in life. Several Member States noted the consistency of this approach with the *For the Future* concept of acting today to address tomorrow’s challenges. The Assistant Director-General, Universal Health Coverage/Healthier Populations, said that WHO headquarters would work with the regional and country offices and Member States to support implementation of the Framework.

- **Traditional and complementary medicine**

The Regional Committee adopted a resolution<sup>2</sup> on traditional and complementary medicine, which among other actions endorsed the *Regional Framework for Harnessing Traditional and Complementary Medicine for Achieving Health and Well-being in the Western Pacific*. Member States underscored the key role played by traditional and complementary medicine (T&CM) in their countries, especially for indigenous groups. Many people in the Region had limited access to conventional medicine for financial, geographical and logistical reasons, meaning that T&CM was often employed as primary health care and used in chronic disease management, palliative care and rehabilitation. Therefore, T&CM could help progress towards universal health coverage, especially among underserved and hard-to-reach populations. Representatives sought WHO support in benchmarking practitioners, practices and products with a view to harnessing the potential of T&CM to strengthen primary health care, as well as addressing any safety and quality issues.

- **Tuberculosis**

The Regional Committee adopted a resolution<sup>3</sup> on tuberculosis (TB), which among other actions endorsed the *Western Pacific Regional Framework to End TB (2021–2030)*. Using the strategic “backcasting” approach, the Framework emphasizes health systems strengthening and contextualizes the global *End TB Strategy* for the Region through people-centred TB services and multisectoral collaboration. Member States expressed appreciation for the comprehensive strategic guidance and its alignment with the global targets and the Region’s

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<sup>1</sup> [Resolution WPR/RC72.R1.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Resolution WPR/RC72.R2.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Resolution WPR/RC72.R3.](#)

thematic priorities. Several representatives highlighted the challenges posed by drug-resistant TB in their countries, as well as difficulties in identifying and treating cases of latent TB. Targeted TB activities were disrupted in many countries by the redirection of resources to pandemic response measures, leading to a fall in case notification and treatment rates despite continued transmission in the Region. The Secretariat expressed its commitment to provide tailored support to develop and strengthen national policies and strategies, reach the unreached and address the pandemic's adverse impact on TB programmes in the Region.

**Submitted by:**

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**Date**