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**PUBLIC HEALTH TRAINING IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC REGION
THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE¹**

SUMMARY

Public health education in Australia has, since 1985, undergone rapid expansion to meet the training needs of the national health workforce. During this process of developing appropriate public health education and research programmes aimed at accommodating the training requirements of the evolving public health workforce, Australian academic institutions acquired considerable experience in tailoring their public health training programmes to meet the changing educational requirements of public health professionals.

A key aspect of Australia's current approaches involves the innovative design of educational strategies to train and develop an effective and competent national public health workforce. Australia envisages that most of these training strategies would be relevant to the national health plan of regional Member States.

Australia proposes that the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office coordinate the exchange of information relating to public health training, teaching units and research projects in the Region. Australia also seeks the cooperation of Member States to determine regional and national requirements for the training of the regional and national public health workforce.

¹Distributed at the request of the Australian delegation as an information document on agenda item 15.

THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

Since 1985, Public Health Education, Research and Training in Australia has undergone considerable development as a consequence of an independent review conducted by a prominent academic, Professor Kerr White. A key recommendation of his report advocated establishing a number of Public Health Education and Research Programmes across Australia. The Australian Government subsequently committed funding to nine programmes across the country for the 1986-1993 period.

The target group and focus of individual programmes were carefully developed to prevent duplication and to ensure that individual programmes complemented each other and contributed to the overall requirement for the development and training of the national health workforce.

Australia is currently exploring a rational mechanism for developing its public health workforce by gathering information, analysing policy, coordinating, planning and reviewing the functions for its public health workforce development nationwide.

A major national review of Australia's public health workforce conducted in 1990 identified training requirements at four levels which would have regional and national application. The levels identified were:

- **Public health specialists** - usually with doctoral training whose function is to teach, guide, and support other workers in research, planning and evaluation.
- **Public health practitioners** - with generalist postgraduate qualifications in one or more public health related disciplines, who work across a wide range of public health activities in the public and private sectors.
- **General and associated health workers** - by far the largest group in public and private sector employment who, in increasing variety and numbers, are seeking and benefiting from postgraduate training in public health disciplines. These range from medical specialists interested in clinical epidemiology or the attainment of management skills, to general practitioners, nurses, and other allied health professionals who feel that public health training (including training in primary health care) may enhance their effectiveness and perhaps their career prospects. In time this should lead to greater shared knowledge and understanding of the new public health between all health workers.
- **Consumer and community organizations** - have a pressing need for public health knowledge and skills. The regional and national provision of a well integrated, cost-effective health service requires that consumer and voluntary organizations be encouraged to play fuller roles in the planning and management of services.

To accommodate this target group's need, Australia is offering a wide range of public health education and training opportunities in its newly restructured post-secondary vocational training.

Australia has established excellent research facilities and developed world-recognized expertise in teaching public health including significant experience in providing training for trainers. It is recognized however that:

- the training emphasis has mainly been on public health specialists and practitioners - mainly medical graduates interested and involved in the more traditional disciplines;
- at all sites, the resources have been vested in medical faculties;
- the requirements of non-medical graduates and those more concerned with the application of social science knowledge and skills to public health practice have not been as well catered for;
- areas of relative neglect include the acquisition of communication, behaviour modification, and management skills in the context of health planning; primary health, and community care and broadly based health development, and
- there is a growing demand for education and training in all of these areas and at all levels within the workforce.

Australia's approach to address the identified training needs of its national health workforce is reflected in the diversity of training programmes offered by a number of its academic institutions (a shortened list of relevant institutions is shown in the Annex).

REGIONAL FOCUS

As a nation in South-East Asia and the wider Pacific region, Australia shares regional concerns that, despite the worldwide progress achieved in the implementation of the strategy "Health for All by the Year 2000", inequities in access to essential health care persist within and between countries in the Region. Given this shared concern, Australia would be willing to cooperate with regional Member States to address this problem through sharing and exchange in the areas of health research, training and education.

The other major concerns relate to the extent of the AIDS/HIV epidemic and the increasing prevalence of noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. The effective solution to these problems resides in our ability to cooperate in the development of regional and national strategies to treat, control and prevent diseases. The regional and national capacities to develop and implement such strategies relies very heavily on a relevant national health plan and a developed and competent health workforce.

A consequence of the growing public health movement in the Region is the increasing demand for appropriate and relevant training by people from all areas of the public health workforce. Currently, health personnel wishing to pursue careers in the newly evolving public health care area, experience uncertainty about the range and level of competencies required in the future workforce.

Australia invites Member States to contribute to the process by identifying the training needs of their national health workforce and cooperate with Australia in developing strategies to provide effective training to the regional and national health workforce.

BRIEF LISTING OF PUBLIC HEALTH TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

NEW SOUTH WALES

1. **University of Sydney - Faculty of Medicine**
 - Department of Public Health: epidemiology and biostatistics, research and training in clinical epidemiology and;
 - Department of Community Medicine at Westmead Hospital has the Centre for Health Economics, Research and Evaluation (CHERE)
2. **University of New South Wales**

has a long international standing in graduate (Masters) training in health-related disciplines; has growing expertise and experience in distance learning; courses are practical rather than academic in orientation.
3. **University of Western Sydney**

training programmes targeted at own public health workers at all levels
4. **University of Wollongong**
 - Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences: Multidisciplinary research and training aimed at producing the information and developing the skills needed for health advancement in the context of ecologically sustainable development.
5. **University of Newcastle**
 - Faculty of Medicine: epidemiology and biostatistics; occupational and environmental health.

VICTORIA

1. **Monash University**
 - Department of Preventive and Social Medicine: epidemiology, toxicology and occupational health
2. **Melbourne University**
 - epidemiology, biostatistics, drug and alcohol and health services evaluation
3. **La Trobe University**
 - social sciences, education, nursing, primary health care, and community health development.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

1. University of Adelaide

- Faculty of Medicine - Department of Community Medicine: epidemiology, health policy and occupational health; postgraduate occupational and environmental health.

2. Flinders University

- Postgraduate diploma and a masters programme in primary health care.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

1. University of Western Australia (UWA)

- Division of Medicine and Dentistry - Department of Public Health: MPH programme

2. Curtin University

training for nurses and allied health workers since the late 1960s

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

1. Australian National University

- Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health (NCEPH): research and teaching in the Master of Applied Epidemiology

QUEENSLAND

1. Tropical Health Programme (THP) jointly operated by the University of Queensland (UQ) and the Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR)

- practical instruction on tropical health and on-site institutional strengthening overseas

2. James Cook University of North Queensland

- Anton Breinl Centre for Tropical Health: tropical public health.