

SEVENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

LUSAKA, REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA, 25–27 AUGUST 2025

Report by the Chair, Dr Elijah Julaki Muchima,
Minister of Health, Republic of Zambia

INTRODUCTION

The Seventy-fifth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Africa convened as an in-person meeting in Lusaka, Zambia, from August 25 to 27, 2025, under the patronage of His Excellency Hakainde Hichilema, President of the Republic of Zambia. The session focused on reviewing progress towards universal health coverage, strengthening health systems, addressing public health emergencies, and adopting key regional strategies.

TOPICS OF REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

The Regional Director reported on the period from July 2024 to June 2025, noting significant progress despite financial and operational challenges. Achievements included progress in universal health coverage, with essential health service packages implemented in 17 countries and malaria vaccines rolled out in 19 countries. Emergency responses were coordinated for 168 events, and over 221 million children were reached through immunization. The report highlighted digital innovation, expanded mental health and nutrition services, and the elimination of several neglected tropical diseases. Key priorities moving forward include strengthening domestic funding, integrating systems, and fostering African-led innovation.

ORAL HEALTH

The Committee reviewed and adopted a regional framework to accelerate the implementation of the Global Oral Health Action Plan, targeting a 10% reduction in major oral diseases and providing essential services to at least 50% of the population by 2030. The framework emphasizes political commitment, resource mobilization, integration into primary care, and community engagement, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Member States were urged to develop national policies and invest in workforce capacity and preventive measures.

ACCELERATING PROGRESS IN THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF WOMEN, CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS BY TRANSFORMING HEALTH SYSTEMS IN THE AFRICAN REGION

Despite notable reductions in maternal and under-five mortality since 2000, the African Region continues to bear a disproportionate share of global deaths. The Committee endorsed a technical paper focused on integrated, people-centred primary health care, governance, workforce expansion, and digital innovation. The strategy calls for increased domestic investment and equitable access to quality services, with an emphasis on reproductive, maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health. AFR/RC75/5

REHABILITATION IN HEALTH SYSTEMS

A regional strategy with an accompanying resolution was adopted to strengthen rehabilitation services as a core component of universal health coverage. The strategy sets targets for 60% of countries to have national rehabilitation strategies with dedicated budgets by 2035. Key priorities include expanding service coverage, workforce training, integrating rehabilitation into emergency preparedness, and leveraging digital technologies. Member States were encouraged to embed rehabilitation in health policies and develop sustainable financing models.

BLOOD PRODUCTS

The Committee endorsed a framework to advance universal access to safe, effective, and quality-assured blood products by 2030. The plan aims to increase voluntary donations, strengthen governance, and integrate blood safety into essential medicines and emergency preparedness. Emphasis was placed on expanding donor mobilization, improving haemovigilance, and supporting local production. Member States were called upon to ensure sustainable financing and robust regulatory frameworks.

MALARIA STRATEGY

A regional strategy and its accompanying resolution addressing threats to malaria control and the 2030 targets was adopted. The strategy responds to stalled progress, persistent high morbidity and mortality, and emerging threats such as drug and insecticide resistance. Member States are urged to strengthen surveillance, invest in workforce capacity, expand vaccine coverage, and adopt innovative tools. The strategy calls for multisectoral collaboration, digital innovation, and enhanced domestic resource mobilization to sustain gains and achieve elimination goals.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND EMERGENCY WORKFORCE

The Committee discussed the critical shortage of health workers, particularly for emergency response, and adopted a report recommending digital integration, expanded training, and fair employment conditions. Key actions include integrating emergency capacities into national plans, increasing retention through incentives, and recognizing community health workers' contributions. WHO and partners will support regional coordination and capacity building to ensure a resilient, emergency-ready workforce.

HEALTH SECURITY: ENHANCING EVENT DETECTION, BUILDING RESILIENT SYSTEMS, AND FOSTERING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

A comprehensive strategy to enhance event detection, build resilient systems, and foster partnerships was endorsed. The approach targets accelerated implementation of integrated surveillance, laboratory and genomic capacity, One Health integration, and sustainable financing. Member States were encouraged to mainstream mental health in emergencies, establish regional training hubs, and strengthen multisectoral and international partnerships. The Secretariat was requested to provide technical support and facilitate resource mobilization.

PROGRAMME BUDGET

The Committee reviewed the Programme Budget for 2026/27, noting a 14% reduction in the base budget and the need for efficiency measures. Despite constraints, the budget advances universal health coverage and emergency preparedness, with a focus on equity and results-driven implementation. Member States were urged to enhance engagement, sustain advocacy, and adopt efficient financial management. The Secretariat

will continue realignment, operational streamlining, and resource mobilization to support country-level impact.

PROCEDURAL DECISIONS

The Committee adopted 12 procedural decisions and three resolutions, two of which were on matters of regional public health relevance. Additional decisions included the accreditation of regional non-State actors, adoption of new criteria for hosting future sessions, replacement of Programme Subcommittee members, and proposals for regional representation on the Executive Board and World Health Assembly committees.

SPECIAL EVENTS

I. POLIO ENDGAME

A high-level event reaffirmed commitment to eradicating all forms of poliovirus and accelerating the transition of polio assets into broader health systems. While wild poliovirus has been eliminated, variant strains persist, requiring sustained surveillance and domestic resource mobilization. Member States were urged to integrate polio functions into national systems and expand immunization.