

73RD SESSION OF THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY – RESUMED

Australia's written statement on Agenda item 14

Australia thanks the Director-General for the report on implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005).

Australia strongly supports the full implementation of the IHR by all State Parties as a key mechanism for strengthening global health security. The COVID-19 pandemic has again highlighted the need for State Parties to report consistent, timely and relevant public health information to ensure the World Health Organization (WHO) can effectively advise on the risks of international spread and requirements for international cooperation.

We note that substantial delays in State Parties' notification of events were reported in the annual update, as well as compliance issues in responding to WHO's verification requests. We are interested to understand this data better.

We acknowledge the WHO's efforts to assist State Parties achieve IHR core capacities, including in our region in the Pacific. As reported however, significant gaps in core capacities remain. Australia supports initiatives that externally assess national IHR implementation and preparedness capacities and acknowledges that over 110 State Parties have completed a Joint External Evaluation (JEE) to date. Australia's engagement in the JEE process helped us prepare for the COVID-19 pandemic.

But we must build on these efforts and strengthen current IHR monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Linking the mechanism to technical and, if appropriate, financial assistance would enable continuous improvements at country-level and support prevention and preparedness.

Australia also values the update provided by the IHR Review Committee and acknowledges its progress to date. The unprecedented nature of this pandemic provides an essential opportunity to review the effectiveness of the IHRs, including whether they remain fit for purpose in assisting health systems to prepare for and respond to global health emergencies. In particular, we agree on the need to further examine preparedness capacities; ensure peer review; authority of IHR national focal points; improve PHEIC declaration processes; and rapid international sharing of information for efficient pandemic control.

We thank the Committee for their efforts to consider the status of implementation of previous Review Committee recommendations and advice on how to address gaps in implementation.

We look forward to considering the IHR Review Committee's recommendations in due course.