Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition

Maternal and child health

Strategy and actions

Member States have made substantial progress in reducing child and maternal mortality. Still, stronger efforts are needed to ensure the highest quality of care for newborn infants in the Region. Two million births per year are still unattended by skilled birth attendants, with poor segments of society having the least access. Neonates now account for 55% of all under-5 deaths.

Full implementation of Early Essential Newborn Care (EENC) interventions will significantly reduce mortality during the critical first 28 days of life – and save the lives of 50,000 newborn infants a year.

Results achieved

The Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health and the United Nations Every Woman Every Child initiative guides global efforts to accelerate progress towards child survival (MDG 4) and maternal and reproductive health (MDG 5).

The Western Pacific is the first WHO region to present a regional platform for action focused on newborn infants. The WHO/UNICEF Action Plan for Healthy Newborn Infants in the Western Pacific Region (2014–2020) was finalized and aligned with the global newborn action plan. The regional plan sets a target for 90% of births attended by skilled birth attendants at the subnational level by 2020.

WHO worked with high-burden Member States using the Regional Early Essential Newborn Care Clinical Practice Pocket Guide to improve the skills of health professionals, raise the quality of birthing facilities, upgrade programme planning and mobilize social support for newborn care. National newborn action plans and annual implementation plans were developed in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Mongolia and the Philippines.

At last year’s session of the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific,
The First Embrace: a healthy start for newborn babies

A newborn baby girl lies on the chest of her mother in a government-run hospital in the Philippines. Her calm, pink and alert appearance is common among babies cuddled in skin-to-skin contact.

“No expensive high-tech solutions are needed. We can save 50 000 newborn lives every year by simply changing basic practices”, Dr Shin said.

WHO and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have released the Action Plan for Healthy Newborn Infants in the Western Pacific Region (2014–2020) which presents crucial interventions focusing on the first three days of life. The action plan is part of a broader push by WHO and UNICEF for early essential newborn care that seeks to replace harmful and outdated practices with cost-effective and simple steps that save lives. The recommendations are the result of intensive consultations with technical experts and country teams, including ministries of health and nongovernmental organizations.

The First Embrace initiative between mother and child aims to provide a healthy start for every newborn baby in the Region. The process includes: immediate and thorough drying followed by sustained skin-to-skin contact; appropriately timed cord clamping with a sterile instrument; and early initiation of exclusive breastfeeding. “First Embrace has a major impact on improving the survival and health of newborn babies,” noted Dr Howard Sobel, WHO Regional Coordinator of Maternal and Child Health.

WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific Dr Shin Young-soo concurs.

the independent Expert Review Group on Women’s and Children’s Health emphasized the importance of improving the tracking of results. In response, WHO is assisting high-burden countries to improve civil registration and vital statistics and the e-Health platform. The Organization also helped the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam improve accountability for women’s health by strengthening their maternal death review programmes.

Future directions

Work toward achieving maternal and child health-related MDGs will be sustained beyond 2015. A stronger focus on quality improvement for maternal and child care, especially interventions in the 24 hours around delivery, includes targeting unacceptable equity gaps among vulnerable and underprivileged groups. WHO will intensify efforts to promote family planning, early childhood development and adolescent health.

With MDG 4 and 5 targets not yet achieved in the Region, universal health coverage can provide a platform for integration of policies and actions to meet the needs of families and communities. WHO continues to work towards ensuring all women and children can access quality and affordable health services.
Nutrition

Strategy and actions

An estimated 12 million children under the age of 5 in the Western Pacific Region are stunted, 7 million are underweight, and 3.4 million suffer from wasting. Nearly one half of all children in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Papua New Guinea and more than one third of all children under age 5 in Cambodia, the Philippines and Solomon Islands are stunted. Anaemia remains an unresolved issue in the Region affecting one in four pregnant women and one in five women of reproductive age.

At the same time, 6.5 million children and one in four adults are overweight. Overweight among adolescents is as high as 60% in some Pacific island countries and areas, such as Cook Islands and Tonga. One in three adults in the Region has high blood pressure, as most Member States exceed the recommended maximum limit for daily salt consumption, some by more than four times. Increased intake of salt, sugar and fat are contributing to alarming rates of obesity, diabetes and hypertension. Inadequate intake of micronutrients, especially iron, iodine and vitamin A, as well as wasting, stunting and low birth weight, remains a significant public health problem in the Region. This growing double burden of malnutrition greatly impacts...
noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in the Region.

In response to Regional Committee resolution WPR/RC63.R2 calling for a scaling up of nutrition in the Western Pacific Region, a draft Action Plan to Reduce the Double Burden of Malnutrition in the Western Pacific (2015–2020) was developed in October 2013 and reviewed at a consultation of 14 Member States in November 2013. The draft action plan synthesizes recommendations from global and regional guidance on nutrition and encourages comprehensive implementation to address diet-related diseases and reduce risk factors for all forms of malnutrition. The plan is also intended to help achieve the six global nutrition targets and implement the Comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition endorsed under World Health Assembly Resolution WHA65.6, as well as two of the nine voluntary targets to prevent and control NCDs (halt the rise in obesity and diabetes and reduce the intake of salt).

**Results achieved**

In September 2013, the Informal Consultation on Reducing the Harmful Impact on Children of Marketing Foods, Beverages, Tobacco and Alcohol reviewed common pathways for regulations and made recommendations to develop strategies concerning industry interference, including the catalytic role of the health sector in engaging with public health lawyers and economists. Pathways for Effective Action through Regulation and Legislation was conceptualized during the consultation as a tool to provide countries with a methodology for strengthening their legal frameworks and enforcement of regulations.

In April 2014, the Consultation on Overweight, Obesity, Diabetes, and Law reviewed wide-ranging legal and fiscal mechanisms to regulate various aspects of unhealthy diets, including marketing, labelling, formulation, retailing, zoning and taxation, as well as the implications on trade, finance, intellectual property and universal health coverage. The consultation also produced recommendations supporting a regional agenda.

WHO supported the strengthening of national nutrition plans in China, Mongolia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, the Philippines and Viet Nam to help prioritize and improve delivery of nutrition services. Policies and legal frameworks to reduce both undernutrition and diet-related NCDs were supported in Cambodia, China, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. Implementation and enforcement of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-Milk Substitutes and reviews of budgeted plans for breastfeeding promotion was supported in China, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

Capacity to deliver nutrition services was strengthened in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic. WHO supported the revision of micronutrient guidelines in Viet Nam to reflect updated WHO guidelines and supported scaling up of weekly iron and folic acid supplementation in the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Viet Nam.

**Future directions**

The work of the nutrition programme will be guided by the action plan to elevate nutrition in national development agendas; to promote breastfeeding and complementary feeding; to strengthen legal frameworks that support healthy diets; to improve accessibility, quality and implementation of nutrition services across public health programmes and settings; and to strengthen financing mechanisms to reinforce healthy diets and ensure delivery and use of nutrition services.

WHO will facilitate high-level policy dialogue to include nutrition in national development plans, link nutrition programmes with NCDs and universal health coverage and provide technical support to ensure evidence-informed policy and coherent national planning for investment in nutrition to reduce the double burden of malnutrition.