

## Introduction

Health systems are the foundation for achieving better and more equitable health outcomes. WHO has worked with Member States to strengthen health systems and move towards universal health coverage (UHC).

In October 2015, a regional action framework entitled *Universal Health Coverage: Moving Towards Better Health* was endorsed by the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific.

The framework provides a platform to advance UHC strategically across five essential health system attributes – quality, efficiency, equity, accountability, and sustainability and resilience – reflecting health policy goals in countries in the Western Pacific Region. The following subheadings detail work in the Region on the five essential health system attributes.

### Quality

Quality and safety are a core concern for UHC. A policy brief on strengthening health workforce regulation in the Western Pacific Region was developed to inform policy dialogues. Patient safety and quality improvements were discussed at meetings in Hong Kong SAR (China) and Malaysia.

WHO supported Member States to increase equitable access to safe, efficacious and affordable quality medicines, vaccines and health technologies. Self-assessments by national regulatory authorities informed institutional development strategies.



Older people are a great resource for future generations in China, which has one of the fastest-growing populations of people aged 60 years and over.

Regulatory systems in eight countries were strengthened for medical product registration, the monitoring and reporting of counterfeit medicines, and pharmacovigilance, including adverse events following immunization. The Regional Alliance for National Regulatory Authorities for Vaccines discussed regulatory harmonization and convergence at its meeting.

WHO strengthened integration of traditional and complementary medicine into health systems: a traditional medicine profile was drafted in Mongolia; herbal medicines were included in the scope of review of Papua New Guinea's medicine and cosmetic act; controls for the supply and use of traditional, herbal and other natural medicines were strengthened in Fiji; and a midterm review of Cambodia's

traditional medicine strategic plan was conducted.

### Efficiency

Making the best use of health resources is an important dimension of UHC. Hospital services management is a growing area of work, because hospitals play a key role in service delivery and health system efficiency. Policy roundtables were held in China on developing a tiered health system to link primary health care and hospitals and on improving retention of primary health-care workers.

WHO fostered national medicines policies that promote transparent and efficient procurement and supply chain management, effective regulation, and the rational use of medicines and health technologies.

Two regional meetings discussed health technology assessments, pharmaceutical pricing and benefit package design to improve access to high-cost essential medicines. Pharmaceutical country profiles were developed for 14 countries.

## Equity

Access to necessary services should not result in financial hardship. WHO strengthened its work on financial protection through a regional workshop on monitoring UHC and health service utilization, jointly organized with partners and participants from seven countries.

Options for increasing and expanding access to high-cost essential medicines were analysed, including exploring the potential for regional price negotiations or a procurement mechanism to lower the cost of hepatitis treatment.

To foster access to health services for migrant population groups in the Greater Mekong Subregion, a review was commissioned. A regional report on mainstreaming equity, gender and human rights was initiated. WHO supported Cambodia and the Lao People's Democratic Republic in gauging and responding to gender-based violence, and supported Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands in developing health sector guidelines.

WHO also strengthened its work on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on equity and intersectoral action. WHO sponsored 16 participants for a University of Otago workshop on Health in All Policies. A Member States consultation in June 2016 discussed a draft

regional action framework on SDGs in preparation for the October 2016 session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific.

## Accountability

Health sector leadership and vision are essential to drive health system performance and move towards UHC. WHO supported high-level policy dialogues, health sector reform and health financing policy development in eight countries. In Cambodia, China and Viet Nam, WHO convened policy dialogues on UHC for older people based on regional and country-specific analyses. A biregional workshop with participants from 21 countries, including 11 from the Western

Pacific Region, aimed to improve tracking of health expenditures. WHO supported Member States to more effectively use law as part of health policy development, implementation and evaluation.

WHO developed a draft monitoring and evaluation framework on SDGs and UHC in the Western Pacific Region, and supported countries in health information system development and information utilization, introducing UHC monitoring dashboards to track health system development and to improve the use of information technologies. A biregional meeting on measuring and achieving UHC through information communication technology was convened jointly with partners in December 2015.



Health check-ups are provided at a free clinic for students in Mongolia. Ensuring that all people and communities have access to quality health services without suffering financial hardship associated with paying for care is central to UHC.



A person approaches the reception desk of the medical referral centre in Davao, Philippines. UHC centres attention on people and communities, calling for health systems to strengthen their responsiveness to the needs of diverse population groups, including those left furthest behind.

To generate evidence to inform policy-making, a regional meeting in November 2015 discussed applied research on health policy and highlighted as priorities provider payment mechanisms, pharmaceutical policy, primary care, benefit package design and the impact of decentralization on health system development.

### Sustainability and resilience

To foster health system responsiveness and adaptability to changing contexts and challenges, WHO supported Member States to consider longer-term sustainability plans associated with the introduction of new vaccines. Collaboration across WHO technical divisions produced an analytical framework that provides

guidance on developing transition plans to improve the sustainability of priority health programmes in a time of reduced donor funding.

Work has been initiated on exploring the use of big data, for example from national health insurance systems, for early detection of diseases and assessing changing service utilization patterns. These efforts included discussions at a regional expert consultation and at the Global Health Research Forum.

The continued availability of effective antimicrobials is critical for the future of health systems globally. WHO led collaborative efforts on antimicrobial resistance across the Western Pacific Region.

### Next steps

The UHC action framework highlights WHO's commitment to support Member States to realize UHC as the overarching vision for health system development.

The next steps include facilitating high-level policy dialogue, supporting health system development through more integrated approaches across health and disease programmes, engaging with development partners at all levels to support the national planning process and ensure donor funding alignment with national health priorities, developing country-specific UHC road maps, and establishing a regional platform for reporting countries' progress and discussing options to advance UHC. ■