Executive summary

Health in the 21st century is likely to be enhanced by new knowledge, new technologies and new medicines. But age-old challenges will continue to persist, including emerging diseases, pandemics and the need to provide health-care services to the most vulnerable populations.

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, health took its rightful place at the centre of the global development agenda. But those of us working in public health know that many of the determinants of health fall outside our reach. Education, environment, transport, energy, labour and other sectors all have profound impacts on health.

In such a complex world, partnership and collaboration – with Member States, other United Nations and multilateral organizations, donors and civil society – will be key to our efforts to achieve the ambitious goal set out in the WHO Constitution: the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health.

In the Western Pacific Region, WHO measures its success by the results we deliver at the country level – better health outcomes for men and women, boys and girls, mothers and their children, older people, and those most vulnerable and too often overlooked.

As you review this year’s annual report, you will see that Member States in the Western Pacific Region made significant progress in improving health outcomes and strengthening health systems.

Morbidity and mortality from communicable diseases continued to decline, while greater attention has been paid to noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and their risk factors. Real progress has been made in the march towards universal health coverage (UHC). And the Region is now better prepared to meet the threats posed by emerging infectious diseases, emergencies and disasters. Partnership and collaboration have driven much of this success.

This brief summary of achievements and challenges serves as an introduction to the work of WHO in the Western Pacific Region in the year that ended 30 June 2017.

Communicable Diseases

The Western Pacific Region continues to make strong progress in the fight against deadly communicable diseases; however, significant threats remain. The focus of the Division of Communicable Diseases is increasingly on collaboration across teams and divisions to help Member States build sustainable health system capacity to control priority diseases – particularly at a time when funding from global health initiatives is declining.

Midway through the Decade of Vaccines, the Region is making progress towards achieving many regional and global immunization goals. In addition,
all malaria-endemic countries in the Region are working towards elimination, and five additional countries have been validated as having achieved elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem.

Three interlinked global health sector strategies endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 2016 called for the elimination of HIV, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and hepatitis as public health threats by 2030. Supporting countries to increase access to new hepatitis medicines has been a key focus of our work, and a number of Member States have made important progress. Technical assistance on HIV, hepatitis and STIs also focused on strengthening essential services, such as those to ensure quality diagnostic services and care were accessible at all levels, from health facilities to communities.

The implementation of the End TB Strategy has been accelerated in line with the Regional Framework for Action on Implementation of the End TB Strategy in the Western Pacific, 2016–2020. Access to innovative tools expanded across the Region in line with WHO policies. Xpert MTB/Rif, a WHO-endorsed rapid diagnostic test, was made available in all high-burden countries, cutting the waiting time for results to just a few hours. Countries started introducing the new shorter treatment regimen for drug-resistant tuberculosis (TB) that reduces treatment duration from 18 months to between 9 and 12 months.

Health Security and Emergencies

Health security and emergency threats due to disease outbreaks, natural disasters and conflicts play out in the Western Pacific Region against a backdrop of worrisome climate change, rapid urbanization, growing migration and the advent of new technologies.

Over the past five years, WHO globally has managed more than 1000 epidemic events and is now responding to scores of acute and protracted health emergencies in many Member States. The Division of Health Security and Emergencies monitors and supports countries in preparing for and responding to emerging infectious diseases and health security threats that continue to test even the most advanced health systems and the most well-structured preparedness and response plans.

Member States in the Region now have greater capacity to manage these threats. They also have a range of global and regional initiatives at their disposal. The recently established global WHO Health Emergencies Programme has a clear-cut mission: to protect health and save lives during outbreaks and emergencies. The programme is working closely with Member States and partners, supporting country capacity-building and system development and coordinating international preparedness for and response to outbreaks and emergencies.

The Cook Islands Minister of Health Nandi Glassie receives recognition for the elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem during the session of the Regional Committee in 2016.
In the Western Pacific Region, public health preparedness continues to be a priority as part of the broader UHC agenda. WHO’s work on health security and emergencies in the Western Pacific has been now integrated into the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, harnessing the Region’s considerable experience and success in collectively addressing health security issues.

The Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies (APSED III) was endorsed in October 2016 by the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific. The renewed strategy builds on past work on health security and emergencies, incorporates lessons from real events and anticipates future needs. It serves as a regional action framework for health security through strengthened implementation of the International Health Regulations, or IHR (2005), including the Joint External Evaluations of IHR (2005) core capacities of Member States.

Moving forward, continued priorities will be managing health security threats, including pandemic influenza through implementing APSED III, strengthening disaster risk management for health and food safety.

**NCD and Health through the Life-Course**

The Division of NCD and Health through the Life-Course works with ministries of health and sectors that impact health to create conditions, methods and approaches to enable dialogue around key themes, including: health and environment; health and sustainable development; violence and injury prevention; road safety; depression and mental health; healthy cities; restriction on marketing of harmful food products to children; protecting the health of mothers and newborn babies; and tobacco-free settings.

Health promotion principles guide the work of the division. In November 2016, WHO and China hosted the 9th Global Conference on Health Promotion in Shanghai, bringing together some 2000 participants and guests from 129 countries, representing health and other sectors, government officials and international organizations. The conference led to two landmark documents – the Shanghai Declaration on Promoting Health in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Shanghai Consensus on Healthy Cities 2016.

More than 100 mayors and municipal leaders from around the world pledged to make their cities healthier during the November 2016 Global Conference on Health Promotion in Shanghai.
The WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2016 endorsed the Western Pacific Regional Framework for Action on Health and Environment on a Changing Planet, which sets the course for the health sector to advocate adaptive measures, policies and actions to protect health and well-being as a co-benefit of interventions in energy, environment, agriculture, transport, housing and other spheres.

In anticipation of the Olympic Games in Tokyo in 2020, WHO convened the Workshop on Tourism and Smoke-free Environments in the Western Pacific in Yokohama in July 2016, bringing the local government together with experts from tourism and public health sectors to discuss how smoke-free environments at tourist sites and large events benefit the work of all three sectors. In addition, important work continued on reproductive, maternal, neonatal and child health, mental health, road safety, disability, and healthy foods and diets.

Health Systems

UHC is the cornerstone of efforts to achieve better health and development outcomes. Recognizing the significant role UHC plays in health outcomes and in achieving the SDGs, the Division of Health Systems focused over the past year on actions that support implementation of Universal Health Coverage: Moving Towards Better Health, a regional action framework endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2015.

Three guidance documents – Regional Action Agenda on Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Western Pacific, SDG & UHC Regional Monitoring Framework, and Universal Health Coverage and Health in the Sustainable Development Goals Baseline Report – were developed to support the efforts of Member States to realize UHC. WHO also established and convened the UHC Technical Advisory Group (TAG).

The SDG action agenda builds on existing global and regional strategies and identifies 12 action domains across four guiding principles – monitoring and evaluation, policy and programme priorities for leaving no one behind, implementation options, and health sector capabilities. The action agenda highlights the importance of realizing “win–wins” through collaboration across sectors and engagement of stakeholders beyond government.
In supporting countries in implementation, initial priorities include strengthening partnerships across sectors and stakeholders. For example, in November 2016, the Second Regional Forum of WHO Collaborating Centres in the Western Pacific brought together more than 140 collaborating centres to review progress, share best practices, strengthen partnerships and identify ways to support Member States in achieving the SDGs. Also in November 2016, as part of WHO’s whole-of-government approach to supporting countries to enhance the effective use of law for health, WHO supported the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea to convene the 2nd Annual Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarian Forum on Global Health, bringing together 45 parliamentarians from 17 countries in the Western Pacific and South-East Asia regions to promote the role of parliamentarians in achieving health in the SDGs.

The division also advanced important work on gender, equity and human rights, health financing, regulatory systems and antimicrobial resistance.

### Pacific Technical Support

The Division of Pacific Technical Support, established in 2010 in Suva, Fiji, coordinates tailored technical support for the Pacific through WHO country offices in Fiji, Kiribati, the Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Over the past year, the division has supported the development of national strategic health plans, annual reviews and planning in several countries and assisted other countries with the development, implementation and monitoring of national policies, plans and guidelines on essential medicines and health technologies, including work on traditional medicines. WHO also is working with Pacific island countries to develop comprehensive national action plans on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and to organize public awareness campaigns.

Acting on a recommendation from the Eleventh Pacific Health Ministers Meeting in April 2015, WHO has worked with the Pacific Community to develop a Healthy Islands monitoring framework. A progress report on the framework will be presented to the Twelfth Pacific Health Ministers Meeting in August 2017 in Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

In support of efforts in the Pacific to prevent and manage NCDs, WHO has supported monitoring against regional and global targets and treaties, such as the Global Monitoring Framework for NCDs and the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Tobacco-free community settings continue to increase across the Pacific, alongside increased taxes and strengthened laws to reduce tobacco use. Nearly all Pacific island countries now have customized the evidence-based protocols on the early diagnosis and management of major NCDs.

The Pacific continues to move towards the elimination of lymphatic filariasis, with many countries now seeing en-
encouraging results from annual mass drug administrations. WHO consulted extensively with Pacific island countries and areas as well as development partners to produce a dedicated chapter in APSED III that addresses the unique challenges in implementing IHR (2005) in the Pacific.

The division also worked closely with Member States in the Pacific over the past year to draft the Pacific Island Countries and Areas – WHO Cooperation Strategy for 2018–2022.

**Leadership**

The Office of the Regional Director, the Division of Programme Management, and the Division of Administration and Finance provide leadership and oversight of WHO work in the Western Pacific Region. Working in close collaboration, they coordinate the work of technical programmes, country support, partner and donor relations, administrative and financial support, and communications.

Their work is guided by the Regional Director’s overarching vision – to ensure country priorities are always at the centre of WHO efforts. The management team also works collectively to identify ways to improve WHO’s effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. In addition, the team leads efforts to align the Region with global reforms, such as managing mobility and recruitment of staff, and reforms to enhance accountability and transparency.

Communications, external relations and partnerships, information products and services, and governing bodies all fall under the purview of the Office of the Regional Director. Technical cooperation with Member States through programme development and operations, country support and editorial services is coordinated by the Division of Programme Management.

The Division of Administration and Finance is comprised of three units – Budget and Finance, Human Resources Management, and Information Technologies and Administration.

WHO in the Western Pacific Region has established a culture that constantly strive to improve performance. As part of that ongoing effort, a review was conducted over the past year to gauge the effectiveness of WHO reforms and analyse the benefits they provided for Member States. The review recommended that particular attention be given to strengthening WHO performance in three areas: placing the right people in the right places; effectively engaging partners; and enhancing communications. These will be priorities for reform over the next two years.

With respect to strengthening communications, the Office of the Regional Director launched the new Strategic Communications Framework for WHO in the Western Pacific Region in June 2017 and a weeklong workshop was conducted with communications specialists from across the Region and the Organization in the same month.

Work also continued over the past year on strengthening accountability, transparency and compliance in the Western Pacific Region, with a new full-time Compliance and Risk Management Officer reporting directly to the Regional Director. Other management priorities over the past year included enhancing WHO country work through better information technology.