Introduction

Collaborating to better protect and promote health

The Western Pacific Region continues to make strong progress in the fight against deadly communicable diseases; however, significant threats remain. Our focus is increasingly on collaborating across teams and divisions to help Member States build sustainable health system capacity to control priority diseases.

A key challenge is the reduction in funding that many countries in the Region face from global health initiatives to combat priority diseases. Domestic financing is key to ensure that health systems maintain and strengthen disease-control capabilities within the context of universal health coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets. For this reason, WHO works closely with Member States to explore options for transitioning smoothly to domestic funding mechanisms.

Midway through the Decade of Vaccines, the Region is making progress towards achieving many regional and global immunization goals. The Region maintained its polio-free status. All Member States except Papua New Guinea and the Philippines have achieved maternal and neonatal tetanus elimination. Measles elimination has been achieved in six countries and two areas. Ahead of schedule, 17 countries and areas, and the Region as a whole, have been verified as having reduced chronic hepatitis B infection among 5-year-old children to less than 1%.

Availability of vaccines also continues to improve. Twenty countries have achieved coverage of 95% or above in three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine. Seventy-five per cent of countries with endemic Japanese encephalitis transmission have introduced vaccine into some or all high-risk areas.

All malaria-endemic countries in the Region have established national elimination goals and are reporting progress towards elimination. This is also now the key focus in addressing the challenge of artemisinin resistance in the Greater Mekong. In helping Member States advance towards elimination, our work has been guided by the Regional Action Framework for Malaria Control and Elimination in the Western Pacific (2016–2020). Using the framework, WHO supported Cambodia, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Viet Nam to submit proposals totalling...

Two complementary regional action plans to combat malaria and dengue were endorsed by the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2016.
some US$ 90 million to support malaria control and elimination efforts to the Global Fund.

Five additional countries have been validated as having achieved elimination of lymphatic filariasis as a public health problem — Cambodia, Cook Islands, the Marshall Islands, Niue and Vanuatu — bringing the regional total to seven countries. WHO continued to facilitate inter-sectoral collaboration with the water, sanitation and hygiene sector and the animal health sector to accelerate elimination of Asian schistosomiasis.

In addition, continued support was provided to eliminate trachoma and strengthen vector-control response capacities in countries affected by arboviral outbreaks, such as dengue and Zika virus disease.

Three interlinked global health-sector strategies endorsed by the World Health Assembly in 2016 called for the elimination of HIV, sexually transmitted infec-
tions (STIs) and hepatitis as public health threats by 2030. These goals should be obtainable with the available tools and full implementation of WHO guidelines.

Despite the efforts of Member States, however, significant service coverage gaps remain, for example, for antiretroviral therapy for HIV and access to treatment for viral hepatitis. New HIV and hepatitis infections continue to occur, along with curable STIs such as syphilis and gonorrhoea. Congenital syphilis is still seen in a number of countries.

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 as a result. 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 assistance also sought to strengthen the integration of various disease programmes to improve service delivery and sustainability.

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 has 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 the duration of the treatment from 18 months to between 9 and 12 months. New TB drugs that can be life-saving for drug-resistant TB patients with few treatment options have also been introduced.

Several countries in the Region embarked on TB patient cost surveys to measure catastrophic costs among TB patients and their families. The survey results will guide countries to enhance financing and social protection mechanisms to alleviate the financial burden to achieve the global target of “zero catastrophic costs due to TB”.

Outreach and mobile immunization clinics are sometimes the only way to vaccinate children in remote areas and limited-resource settings. This mobile clinic in Papua New Guinea makes vaccine available to high-risk and hard-to-reach communities.