4. HIV and viral hepatitis: leaving no one behind

HIV and viral hepatitis present major public health challenges in the Western Pacific. Despite the availability of proven interventions and life-saving medications, there are 97 000 new HIV infections every year. Further, only 55% of people living with HIV (PLHIV), and a tiny fraction (less than 5%) of people living with hepatitis B and C, are receiving treatment. WHO is working closely with Member States to pursue innovative ways to increase access to essential prevention, care and treatment.

In the Philippines, WHO partnered with the Department of Health and a community-based organization to demonstrate how peer-driven delivery of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) can help curb the rapid rise in new infections among men who have sex with men. PrEP is an intervention whereby individuals who are HIV-negative but have substantial risks take daily antiretroviral drugs to prevent infection. The results will inform the potential national expansion of PrEP.

WHO is supporting Viet Nam to reach coverage targets for PLHIV through domestic financing. In November 2016, the Prime Minister signed into policy national health insurance coverage of drugs, consultations and laboratory fees. The policy substantially increased health insurance coverage for PLHIV to 82% in 2017 from 50% in 2016.

Over the past year, the Region made headway towards universal access to hepatitis B and C treatment. In high-income countries and areas — including Australia, Hong Kong SAR (China), Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Singapore — public financing made universal coverage of hepatitis treatment possible. Lower-middle-income countries made treatment accessible through health insurance, including Mongolia for hepatitis C and China for hepatitis B. Or they used lower-priced generic medicines, such as Malaysia did for hepatitis C. Kiribati became the first Pacific island country to establish national treatment services for hepatitis B.

These have been important steps, but much work remains to be done. WHO will continue to work with Member States to make sure no one is left behind in ensuring access to life-saving interventions.