



World Health
Organization

Western Pacific

Region's health ministers endorse action to promote access to vaccines, safe surgery and healthy ageing

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Health ministers across the World Health Organization (WHO) Western Pacific Region endorsed action plans to improve access to life-saving vaccines and safe and affordable surgery and to promote healthy ageing. The resolutions were adopted on the final day of the seventy-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, which was held virtually this week.

Protecting all with immunization

Delegates today endorsed the *Regional Strategic Framework for Vaccine-preventable Diseases and Immunization in the Western Pacific (2021–2030)*. It calls on Member States to further strengthen and expand immunization systems and programmes along the life course, strategically manage health intelligence on vaccine-preventable diseases and immunization, and ensure preparedness for and response to public health emergencies related to vaccine-preventable diseases, vaccines and immunization programmes.

Countries and areas of the Region have achieved many successes in eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases, such as maintaining polio-free status over the Region since 2000, eliminating measles in nine countries and rubella in five countries in 2019, and reducing chronic hepatitis B infection among children.

However, many people are still being missed by immunization efforts, leading to the emergence, resurgence and large-scale outbreaks over the past two years of vaccine-preventable diseases such as vaccine-derived poliovirus, measles and diphtheria in high-risk communities within the Region.

While more vaccines are now available for various age groups such as adolescents, adults and older people and against various diseases such as cervical cancer, pneumococcal disease and seasonal flu, the expansion of immunization service delivery throughout the life course has not yet occurred in many countries. Moreover, immunization systems and programmes are still not resilient enough to withstand major public health emergencies.

The Framework adopted today sets out 18 strategies to expand the scope of immunization, maximize the benefits of vaccines and immunization programmes in the Region, and achieve and sustain elimination of additional vaccine-preventable diseases beyond those traditionally targeted, aiming to make the Region free from vaccine-preventable morbidity, mortality and disability towards 2030.

Safe and affordable surgery

Delegates endorsed the *Action Framework for Safe and Affordable Surgery in the Western Pacific Region (2021–2030)*. It calls for the development of well-functioning “surgical ecosystems” to solve service delivery problems and achieve universal access to safe and affordable surgery.

Surgical care saves lives and improves the quality of life of millions of people every year. Most people will require surgical care at some point in their lives, for a disease or condition such as complications of obstructed labour, a birth defect, cataracts, cancer, heart disease, stroke, complications of diabetes, and burns or injuries from domestic, industrial or road accidents.

But access to safe and affordable surgery remains limited in the Region. Geographical challenges can make it hard for people on far-flung islands and other remote areas to access advanced care. It remains unaffordable for many in places where patients need to pay out of pocket. There are challenges for patient safety due to the complexity of care and the risk of infection. Historically, it has been less prominent in the long-term health plans of countries and opportunities have been missed to build up surgical ecosystems – networks of skilled health workers, processes, equipment and other material necessary for delivering quality surgical care.

The Framework adopted today guides countries through a process of bringing together stakeholders to generate a shared vision, collaborate on evidence-based action, redesign existing systems, and strengthen information to measure progress and inform further action.

Healthy ageing

Delegates endorsed the *Regional Action Plan on Healthy Ageing in the Western Pacific*. It calls for the transformation of societies and health systems to promote healthy ageing.

More than 240 million people aged 65 years and over live in the Western Pacific Region, and this number is expected to double by 2050. Changing population demographics have significant health, social and economic implications such as a shift in disease burden towards noncommunicable diseases and a growing population with more diverse health and social needs.

But challenges can turn into opportunities when societies become more age-friendly. People who live longer and healthier can engage in activities over their whole lifetime. A growing older population that is better educated and healthier can contribute more, through doing paid and unpaid work, consuming and investing, passing down knowledge and traditions, and acting as caregivers for young family members.

The Regional Action Plan adopted today outlines actions for countries to transform health and social systems so that people stay healthy throughout their lives and participate in society. It also encourages countries to change the discourse on ageing to one that recognizes the many valuable contributions that older people can make to society when they are supported to do so.

Closure of session

The seventy-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific concluded today.

Notes to editors:

A live stream of the Regional Committee proceedings, official documents, fact sheets and videos on the issues addressed this week can be accessed here:

www.who.int/westernpacific/about/governance/regional-committee/session-71

Follow @WHOWPRO on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) and the hashtag #RCM71.

Working with 194 Member States across six regions, WHO is the United Nations specialized agency responsible for public health. Each WHO region has its own regional committee – a governing body composed of ministers of health and senior officials from the region's Member States. Each regional committee meets annually. This year, because of COVID-19, they met virtually for the first time.

The 37 countries and areas of the WHO Western Pacific Region: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Cook Islands, Fiji, France (which has responsibility for French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and Wallis and Futuna), Hong Kong SAR (China), Japan, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Macao SAR (China), Malaysia, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Mongolia, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (which has responsibility for Pitcairn Islands), the United States of America (which has responsibility for American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam), Vanuatu, and Viet Nam.

Related links:

- [Immunization fact sheet; video](#)
- [Safe and affordable surgery fact sheet; video](#)
- [Healthy ageing fact sheet; video](#)
- [Report of the Regional Director for the Western Pacific, 1 July 2019–30 June 2020](#)
- [For the Future, towards the healthiest and safest Region: A vision for the WHO work with Member States and partners in the Western Pacific](#)
- [COVID-19 in the Western Pacific Region](#)