

Meeting Report

AD HOC VIRTUAL MEETING ON COVID-19 MANAGING THE EVOLVING COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND PREPARING PRIMARY HEALTH CARE TO MEET FUTURE HEALTH NEEDS



2 December 2021
Virtual meeting

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC

English only

MEETING REPORT

AD HOC VIRTUAL MEETING ON COVID-19
(MANAGING THE EVOLVING COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND PREPARING PRIMARY
HEALTH CARE TO MEET FUTURE HEALTH NEEDS)

Virtual meeting
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AD HOC VIRTUAL MEETING ON COVID-19

Managing the evolving COVID-19 pandemic and preparing primary health care to meet future health needs

2 December 2021

MEETING REPORT

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With support from:

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC

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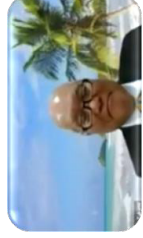
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AD HOC Virtual Meeting on COVID-19

Managing the Evolving COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparing Primary Health Care to Meet Future Health needs

2 December 2021

Virtual meeting

NOTE

The views expressed in this report are those of the participants of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum on Global Health Ad Hoc Virtual Meeting on COVID-19 and do not necessarily reflect the policies of the convenors.

This report has been prepared by the World Health Organization Regional Office for the Western Pacific as the Secretariat of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum on Global Health.

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SUMMARY

On 2 December 2021, the Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum on Global Health (Forum) convened an ad hoc virtual meeting to enhance the role of parliamentarians in preparing for the next phase of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and investing in primary health care for the future. In all, 27 parliamentarians participated from 13 countries, with a further country sending an observer. The meeting was chaired by the Honourable Mr Kim Minseok, President of the Forum, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO).

The meeting objectives were:

- 1) to obtain updated information from WHO on the COVID-19 situation in the Western Pacific and South-East Asian regions;
- 2) to share experiences on managing the evolving COVID-19 pandemic, including preparing for endemic COVID-19 scenarios; and
- 3) to consider how parliamentarians and the Forum can support efforts to rethink and invest in primary health care to meet the future health needs of the Asia-Pacific region.

WHO provided technical presentations, including updates on the COVID-19 situation in the Asia-Pacific region and the Omicron variant. Discussions during the meeting were initiated with presentations from Japan, the Philippines, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and Thailand. Parliamentarians shared their experiences with managing the COVID-19 pandemic, preparing for future endemic scenarios, and preparing primary health care to meet the health needs of the future.

Parliamentarians encouraged each other to support national and regional efforts, including by:

- maintaining leadership for the ongoing COVID-19 response and placing primary health care at the centre of plans to manage future endemic scenarios;
- protecting health budgets and advocating for increased investment in primary health care to build health system resilience and aid the social and economic recovery;
- identifying opportunities to harness the COVID-19 pandemic to transform health systems and strengthen primary health care, including by leveraging digital technologies and innovation;
- enacting legislation to support primary health care reforms, including adjusting purchasing arrangements to prioritize preventive services, set standards and monitor quality, and support decision-making at the local level; and
- working across parliament and the community to build partnerships to advance whole-of-government and whole-of-society efforts to enhance primary health care.

Participants agreed that primary health care has been of fundamental importance to the COVID-19 response and is essential for achieving the health-related Sustainable Development Goals and ensuring health systems meet future needs and remain financially sustainable amid rising noncommunicable disease burden and rapidly ageing populations.

Moving forward, WHO welcomed engagement and input from parliamentarians on country actions and committed to sharing technical information, providing technical guidance and facilitating communication between Forum members, particularly on legislative changes related to the COVID-19 response and preparing primary health care for the future.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Asia-Pacific Parliamentary Forum on Global Health is a platform for parliamentarians to exchange ideas, build political will, strengthen capacities and foster collaboration in driving sustainable action for health. Established in 2015 with technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific and other partners, the Forum is open to the 30 countries comprising the Member States of the WHO Western Pacific Region and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The Forum is strategically positioned to help align global health mandates with regional and domestic priorities and to facilitate national implementation of international health commitments. The Forum is an important part of WHO support to Member States in the Asia-Pacific region in championing health beyond the health sector and taking a whole-of-government approach to enhance the rule of law in health governance and expand the role of law in health policy.

On 7 January 2020, authorities in China identified a novel coronavirus from a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown aetiology in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei province. On 30 January 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern, then a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As of the 2 December, the date of the ad hoc virtual forum, more than 241 million confirmed cases and more than 4.9 million deaths have been reported globally. Countries and areas in the Western Pacific Region have reported more than 9 million cases and more than 125 000 deaths.

As the pandemic nears the end of its second year, vaccines are proving to be an effective tool to prevent serious illness, hospitalization and death and ease the health system burden. WHO continues to work alongside partners to develop, manufacture and deploy safe and effective vaccines, including through the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator and its vaccines pillar, COVAX. Globally, more than 6.5 billion doses have been administered. The emergence of the Omicron variant of concern presents a new challenge, causing countries to adjust their strategies amid limited information and uncertainty.

COVID-19 has had wide-ranging health and socioeconomic impacts on all parts of society, with vulnerable populations disproportionately affected. It has demonstrated the need to build strong and resilient health systems and societies to support health and well-being and provide a foundation for long-term economic development. Universal health coverage through primary health care is key for strong, resilient and efficient health systems, reaching those who are vulnerable and promoting pandemic preparedness and prevention.

Primary health care supports an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic and will play an even larger role as the pandemic enters its next phase. Leadership, the strength of health systems and the public's confidence in those systems have been determining factors in the quality of the pandemic

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