

# Regional Framework for Action on Access to Essential Medicines in the Western Pacific (2011–2016)



World Health  
Organization

Western Pacific Region

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# Executive Summary



In 2004, the *Regional Strategy for Improving Access to Essential Medicines in the Western Pacific Region (2005–2010)* was endorsed by Member States to provide practical and evidence-based guidance for developing actions to improve access to essential medicines and strengthen pharmaceutical systems.<sup>1</sup> Depending on the local context, countries chose specific areas on which to focus and adapted their implementation plans according to their national objectives.

In spite of the progress made over the years, access to essential medicines of assured quality still poses problems for countries in the Western Pacific Region. In high-income countries, problems are related to rational use and cost containment, while in low- and most middle-income countries, ensuring access to essential medicines, especially for the poor and the vulnerable, remains a major public health problem.

After food, medicines account for the second-largest household expenditure. A substantial portion of the population in low- and lower-middle-income countries may have to make difficult choices as they have to pay out of pocket for their vital medicines.<sup>2</sup> In the Western Pacific Region, catastrophic medicine payments can entrench individuals and families in poverty.<sup>3</sup> Recent price surveys show that even the lowest-priced generics are often unaffordable for the poor.<sup>4</sup>

The increasing need for essential medicines due to the growing burden of diseases is stretching country pharmaceutical systems and budgets. Thus, more resources are required for reliable and timely delivery of quality assured medicines as well as their appropriate utilization. To address the growing need, governments must ensure efficient use of resources that the system and the people can afford. They should protect the public from substandard and counterfeit medicines, increase access to medicines while containing costs, and ensure efficiency of supply chains and rational use of medicines.

Countries in the Western Pacific Region have taken a comprehensive approach to prioritizing goals for the pharmaceutical sector and identifying strategies to attain them. They have used the *Regional Strategy for Improving Access to Essential Medicines in the Western Pacific Region (2005–2010)* as a practical guide for developing and implementing actions in a synergistic way.

To ensure continuation and reinforce the strategies and actions outlined in the Regional Strategy and to highlight new and emerging challenges that call for action, the *Regional Framework for Action on Access to Essential Medicines in the Western Pacific (2011–2016)*, hereafter called the Framework for Action, was developed through a consultative process with experts and representatives of Member States. The following are the objectives:

- (1) to provide strategic direction and guidance for WHO collaboration with Member States;
- (2) to ensure continuation and reinforce the strategies and actions outlined in the *Regional Strategy for Improving Access to Essential Medicines in the Western Pacific Region (2005–2010)* and include new and emerging issues that call for action; and
- (3) to serve as a basis for response to the challenges faced by countries in the development and implementation of actions.

The Framework for Action will serve as a basis for country collaboration in improving access to essential medicines. The Framework is organized under the following headings:

- (1) policy and access to essential medicines;
- (2) regulation and quality assurance; and
- (3) rational selection and use of medicines.

The first component on policy and access to essential medicines addresses issues of medicines policy and coordination, adequate financing, affordable prices, procurement and supply management, access to medicines, intellectual property rights and international trade agreements.

The second component on quality assurance addresses issues of regulatory control, substandard medicines and counterfeit medicines.

The third component on rational selection and use of medicines addresses the issues of evidence-based selection of essential medicines and rational use of medicines.

A set of core indicators are proposed which countries can adapt to their context to monitor implementation and evaluate progress. Along with these indicators, a “traffic light” system has been devised to provide “feedback at a glance” and to alert Member States to areas that may require more attention. This system is being introduced on a pilot basis; it is anticipated that it will be refined on a regular basis as feedback will be received from countries.

WHO in the Western Pacific Region will use the Framework for Action to guide its work on essential medicines at the regional level as well as its collaborative work with countries and partners for the period 2011–2016. Simultaneously, based on the national context, countries may use the Framework for Action as policy options to guide their strategic planning and collaboration with WHO.

# Background



## 1.1 Access to essential medicines in the Western Pacific Region

Sustainable and effective pharmaceutical systems are crucial for health service delivery and primary health care. The complexity of these systems require that medicines are of good quality, safe and effective, that they are available at all times in all levels of health care, are affordable and are properly used by providers and consumers.

In the Western Pacific Region, access to essential medicines of assured quality still poses problems for many countries. While high-income countries are tackling the increasing problems of rational use and containing costs, most low- and middle-income countries continue to face difficult challenges in ensuring access to essential medicines, especially for the poor and the vulnerable. Access to essential medicines in majority of these countries remain to be a major public health concern.

After food, medicines account for the second-largest household expenditure. A substantial portion of the population in low- and lower-middle-income countries may

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