

# Healthy Urbanization

Regional Framework  
for Scaling Up and Expanding  
Healthy Cities in the Western Pacific  
2011 – 2015



**World Health  
Organization**  
Western Pacific Region



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## Acknowledgements

The Regional Framework for Scaling Up and Expanding Healthy Cities in the Western Pacific (2011–2015) is the product of intensive development, discussion and consultation with Member States and experts in the WHO Western Pacific Region. Review of the draft Framework was conducted during the meeting of the Working Group on Scaling Up and Expanding Healthy Cities in the Western Pacific Region held 16–17 November 2009 in Manila, Philippines. The Framework was further reviewed for finalization during the Meeting of National Focal Points on Scaling Up and Expanding Healthy Cities in the Western Pacific Region convened 8–10 September 2010 in Dalian, China, as well as during the Meeting for Developing Technical Networks and Resource Centres for Healthy Cities convened 26 October 2010 in Gangnam-gu, Seoul, Republic of Korea. In this regard, we recognize the outstanding contributions of the temporary advisers, resource persons, participants and the secretariat of the three meetings.

## Message from the Regional Director

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Throughout the world we are witnessing a period of rapid and unprecedented urbanization. The Western Pacific Region is home to roughly 30% of the world's population, more than half of which live in cities. We are faced with enormous challenges trying to make the Region's cities liveable, healthy and safe. The rate of urbanization predicted for Asia exceeds that of other Regions and our task will become increasingly difficult if we do not act now.

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Where we live, study, work and play dramatically impacts our health. Yet for the most part, the health sector has little influence or power to change these things. So here lies the great health sector paradox of the 21st century: we, in the health sector, can treat the sick, but we struggle to keep people healthy. The power to keep people healthy lies, for the most part, outside the health sector. It lies with the whole of government, with national and local government leaders who are responsible for education, for transport, for food and nutrition, for housing, for sanitation, for planning our urban environment, for addressing all the factors that shape urban life and the well-being of individuals, families and communities.

The WHO Healthy City Programme, which has existed for more than two decades, was initiated in order to address the issues that can make us sick in our cities, townships and villages. The problems are now becoming more and more global in nature – the causes lie beyond the scope of local governments' actions. Now more than ever, cities need all the support they can get to work towards well-planned, controlled and healthy urbanization.

It is timely to scale up and expand Healthy Cities in the Region – also with the support of national governments. National governments need to be committed to mobilizing and providing the resources to local governments to address the wicked problems of urbanization.

The main target group for this Regional Framework, therefore, includes representatives from the national level. This Framework suggests key action areas specifically for countries and for WHO to support scaling up and expanding Healthy Cities in the Region in order to drive healthy urbanization

As the Director-General of WHO, Dr Margaret Chan said, "Cities are the future of our world. We must act now to ensure that they become healthy places for all people". We in the Western Pacific Region are committed to contributing to this goal.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Shin Young-soo'.

**Shin Young-soo, MD, Ph.D.**  
Regional Director

## Purpose of the Regional Framework

This Regional Framework provides a reference point for action primarily for national governments and for WHO as to how they can support scaling up and expanding Healthy Cities within their countries and the Region. The Framework should not be regarded as prescriptive for all situations. It suggests five strategic approaches and recommends key action areas under each of the approaches. These key action areas provide guidance on activities that are considered critical in scaling up and expanding Healthy Cities. They should be considered depending on the countries' commitment, ability and capacity to scale up and expand action towards healthy urbanization and on the past experience in Healthy Cities – or other initiatives related to healthy urbanization.

“Healthy urbanization” is defined as the process of “enabling people to gain greater control over their health and their determinants through good urban governance that creates equal social opportunities for health for all”. Reflecting this definition, the hard work of achieving healthy urbanization lies with the local governments – and with their citizens. This Framework does not suggest that a top-down approach to Healthy Cities will solve the wicked urban problems. Rather, it calls for a systems-wide approach that expands the original concept of Healthy Cities beyond the boundaries of local governments and promotes the need for a strong stewardship role of the national government. As suggested in the final report published by the Knowledge Network on Urban Settings of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, “National government institutions need to equip local government institutions with the mandate, powers, jurisdiction, responsibilities, resources and capacities to undertake ‘healthy urban governance’”.

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