

Key facts

Four decades of rapid economic development and improvements in health have **not benefited everyone equally** in the Western Pacific Region. In every country, some groups continue to have limited access to quality health services and poor health outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that population groups who are the most disadvantaged are exposed to **higher levels of risk, have less access to preventive and treatment services** and tend to have poorer outcomes from COVID-19 infection. This, in turn, compromises global, regional and national health security efforts.

More people in the Region became unreached during the **COVID-19 pandemic, missing out on essential health services.**



Healthy people are necessary for sustainable development, and health inequalities negatively impact economies and increase costs to health systems. Therefore, investment in public health is likely to produce a high rate of return through increased productivity, aversion to downstream health costs and improved preparation for future emergencies.

The pandemic has disrupted lives across all countries and communities and negatively affected global economic growth. **Inequality widened within and between countries**, and those already left behind were disproportionately affected.

The challenges of the post-pandemic recovery in the Western Pacific and reaching the unreached is compounded by pre-existing challenges such as globalization, climate change, rapid and unplanned urbanization, population ageing and the increasing prevalence of noncommunicable diseases, including mental health issues.

Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have demonstrated how quickly innovations can be developed and scaled up and a more robust understanding of the importance of building strong, integrated, resilient, **high-quality health systems that reach everyone everywhere.**

A concerted effort is now needed to build back better and transform health systems. This will mean ensuring that health sectors have the capabilities to **identify who is unreached routinely** – whether this is because of the situations in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, and/or because of stigma and discrimination – and overcome the barriers to reaching them.

As countries grapple with how to build back better, investing in health, particularly in the health of those unreached, will produce significant returns, enable an effective response to future health emergencies and be critical to ensuring the Region's sustainable development.

WHO response

The new *Regional Framework for Reaching the Unreached in the Western Pacific* aims to support transformed health-care delivery and public health systems across the Region so that they **routinely reach everyone, everywhere and ensure equitable health outcomes**. It calls on Member States, partners and stakeholders to:

- **Demonstrate strong political commitment and leadership** to ensure the kinds of change that address the factors that create disadvantages and leave people unreached by health systems.
- **Align governance, financing and legal structures** to develop systems that can overcome key issues and engage unreached communities in these endeavours.
- **Engage multiple stakeholders across and beyond health sectors** to maximize the use of limited resources in pursuing health systems that routinely reach the unreached and achieve equitable health outcomes.
- **Progressively build data and evidence systems and capabilities** for using them so that unreached groups can be routinely identified and progress monitored.
- **Transform health systems** so that they are based on strong primary health care, are comprehensive, integrated, high quality and people-centred, and routinely reach unreached groups.
- **Maintain capability** for fast responses to specific challenges or crises impacting unreached populations beyond the immediate capacity of existing health services.

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