

# Leveraging innovations to accelerate health impact and shape well-being

Fact sheet: September 2023

## Key facts

Through new processes, products, programmes, policies or systems, **health innovation improves health and equity**.

The Western Pacific Region has established itself as a **leader in innovation**, driven by scientific advancements, technology and its diverse geographic, cultural and socioeconomic characteristics.

Today, health innovations have had **limited success in scaling for impact** due to governance issues, insufficient funding, lack of awareness of their value to public health, and limited evidence.

**Government leadership in health innovation is crucial** to unleash the potential of health innovations, solve problems, accelerate impact, and shape the future health and well-being of the people of the Western Pacific Region.



Health innovation involves developing and implementing new processes, products, programmes, policies or systems that **result in improvements in health and equity**. The process follows an iterative approach and can **arise from new ideas or the combination of existing concepts**. Health innovation can be disruptive solutions that leverage scientific research and technological development, or manifest as social innovation, addressing health needs by promoting increased participation and community empowerment.

Health innovation in the Western Pacific Region is **shaped by the Region's diversity in geography, culture and socioeconomic conditions**. The Region is home to countries with high rankings in the Global Innovation Index, top science and technology clusters, and national and regional ecosystems that conduct social experiments and foster technological innovations for health.

Social innovation approaches, which work to improve health by engaging communities in creating and sustaining solutions, have been applied across various health areas in the Region to **fulfil public health policy objectives and to achieve equity in access to care**. In Fiji, the use of frugal technologies has improved the affordability of life-saving oxygen, for example. In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, community involvement has increased utilization of primary health care. Cities in the Region have scaled up health innovations, such as the Seoul 50+ initiative in the Republic of Korea that enables older adults to remain active and engaged in society.

Despite the diversity and abundance of innovations in the Region, many have had **limited success tackling health challenges or contributing to population well-being**. Health areas with limited market appeal have been marginalized, such as treatment of neglected tropical diseases, research in rare diseases, development of new antibiotics, prevention of disease, health promotion, and affordable maternal and child health care. In areas where innovations are already cost-effective, such as telemedicine, **a lack of mature governance, long-term funding, supporting systems, as well as evaluation and evidence, have hindered the ability to scale for impact**.

## WHO response

WHO, in consultation with Member States, stakeholders, partners and experts developed the draft *Western Pacific Regional Innovation Strategy*, which aims to support governments to exploit health innovations to shape the future of health and well-being for the people of the Region. It urges Member States to:

- **Prioritize health innovation policies** by placing them at the forefront of policy agendas, including fostering collaboration and partnerships;
- **Foster a culture of innovation and learning** within the public sector through capacity-building initiatives, including staying informed and adaptive to emerging trends in health innovation;
- **Allocate long-term public financing** to scale up mission-oriented health innovations;
- **Establish comprehensive measurement systems** to assess both the processes and outcomes of health innovations in the public and private sectors, facilitating learning and adaptation.

WHO will support Member States through developing and disseminating norms and guidance, demonstrating leadership, enhancing capacity-building in health innovation, shaping and influencing innovation ecosystems, and facilitating implementation.

Through a transformative mindset and taking bold action, WHO and Member States will pave the way for a healthier and safer future for the people of the Western Pacific.

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