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WHO events addressing public health priorities

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[1]This report is extracted from the Summary report on the Expert consultative meeting to discuss priority national population-based surveys for better reporting of WHO regional core indicators and SDG health-related indicators, Cairo, Egypt, 11–12 December 2017 (http://applications.emro.who.int/docs/IC_Meet_Rep_2018_EN_16792.pdf).

The strengthening of health information systems is a priority for the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Intensive work with countries since 2012 has resulted in a framework for health information systems (1) and 68 core indicators that focus on three main areas, which are: monitoring health determinants and risks; assessing health status, including morbidity and cause-specific mortality; and assessing health system response. Key Sustainable Development Goals' (SDG) indicators (2) have been recently incorporated in the regional core indicators list to provide countries with a unified approach for reporting on health-related indicators. This brings the current list of core indicators to 75. A recent assessment of the capacity of countries in the Region to report on the initial 68 core health indicators showed that most of the indicators within the area of health determinants and risks come from population-based surveys that should be conducted every 3–5 years (3). Furthermore, a majority of countries use international funds to conduct the population-based surveys, thereby limiting their ability to conduct surveys according to their needs (3).

Within the context of the SDGs, population-based surveys still play a key role as sources of data for most of the SDG 3 and other SDG health-related indicators. In August 2016, the WHO

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (WHO/EMRO) organized an intercountry meeting to review the results of the assessment and map out strategies to better support countries to report on the core indicators and the SDG 3 indicators on health (4). During the meeting, participants recommended the need to document the available national population-based surveys in the Region and identify those surveys that are expected to generate data for the core health indicators and SDG 3 indicators.

A team of consultants then developed options for a prioritized list of national household surveys in response to recommendations by meeting participants. Following this, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean convened an expert consultative meeting to discuss priority population-based surveys for better reporting of WHO regional core indicators and SDG 3 indicators in Cairo, Egypt, 11–12 December 2017 (5).

The objectives of the meeting were to:

discuss current initiatives and future plans by WHO and other agencies to improve health statistics through national population-based surveys in the Region;

present results of an agreed programme of work by external consultants on prioritizing surveys and make them applicable to the countries in the Region;

discuss modalities and capacities to report on WHO regional core indicators, SDG 3 indicators and other SDG health-related indicators; and

review recommended modules and plans for national population-based surveys and the needed resources for improving the reporting and quality of health indicators in the Region.

The meeting was inaugurated by Dr Arash Rashidian, Director, Information, Evidence and Research, WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, Cairo, Egypt. In his opening remarks, he reiterated the commitment of WHO in supporting countries to strengthen their national health information systems and enhance reporting on the regional core health indicators to monitor progress towards universal health coverage. He noted that strengthening

national health information systems is part of the overarching agenda of implementing the regional framework for health information systems and improving civil registration and vital statistics reporting.

In working groups, the experts discussed the following key areas related to the implementation of population-based surveys: a recommended list and timetable for population-based surveys for better reporting of core health indicators; main survey modules to be considered as part of survey plans; the number of recommended surveys to be conducted and the ideal inter-survey period; and survey and data needs for countries experiencing humanitarian emergencies.

Recommendations

Recognizing the critical role of population-based surveys in generating data for most of the core health and SDG health-related indicators, experts agreed the following recommendations to facilitate implementing a prioritized list of national population-based survey plans and modules, and enhancing efforts to improve health information systems.

To Member States

Enhancing efforts to increase awareness of the role of health information systems in policy planning.

Aligning survey plans with national health strategic plans to effectively monitor implementation of health strategies.

To WHO

Providing further guidance on the following key components of population-based survey implementation: survey modules; time intervals between surveys; geographical coverage; and suitable representative sample sizes.

Supporting development of realistic national survey plans for population-based surveys that can be effectively implemented using available expertise and resources.

Providing guidance on implementing population-based surveys in countries with humanitarian

emergencies.

Supporting countries in developing data sharing policies and databases to enhance public access to data in conformity with each country's statistics legislation.

Supporting countries to establish national coordination mechanisms or working groups to mobilize resources and expertise for implementing population-based surveys.

References

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