



New International Development Policy: Submission from the Australian Network of WHO Collaborating Centres

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Introduction

The Australian Network of World Health Organization Collaborating Centres (WHOCCs) is delighted to present this submission to the new Australian International Development Policy ahead of 2023-24 Federal Budget. There is no doubt that the challenges faced in Australia's region are vast, complex, and ever-changing. Australia not only has the responsibility but the desire to assist our neighbouring countries. The Australian Network of WHOCCs is supportive of the Federal Government's approach to international development outlined in the Terms of Reference; focusing on sustainable development, States' and community resilience, connecting partners and collective action. We support the proposed First Nations approach to foreign policy, with added commitment to ambitious climate action, poverty reduction, human rights, and gender equality, disability and inclusion. We highlight that health is not only a basic human right, but fundamental to this honouring this commitment. Therefore, to meet such difficult challenges in our region, rooted in poverty, climate change and inequalities, there is a real need for greater partnerships, collaboration, and expertise in global health. The focus question addressed in this submission will be: **What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?**

The Network of WHOCCs

World Health Organization Collaborating Centres (WHOCCs) were created in 1949 and have been part of the WHO ever since. They are global centres of excellence, not part of or funded by the WHO but an essential part of international cooperation on health. While the WHO's strategic priorities and technical workplans guide activities and programs across the world, the WHO often relies on the expertise, advice and cooperation of WHOCCs to deliver on the priorities and execute its workplans. There are more than 800 centres globally, each of which must be re-designated every four years based on its expertise, collaboration and contribution to the WHO's strategic goals.

Australian WHOCCs have the technical research, and implementation and training expertise to play a vital role in many aspects of the WHO's global work. **Australian WHOCCs represent a broad cross-section of health including Infectious Diseases, Health Systems Strengthening, Workforce Capacity Building, Non-Communicable Diseases, Climate Change and Health Impacts and Health Promotion.**



Being in the Pacific region, Australian centres have strong links to the Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO), the South East Asia Regional Office (SEARO) and to WHO headquarters in Geneva. **Australia is home to 53 of the 800 Collaborating Centres worldwide, which reflects both the range and depth of expertise in the country and the commitment to regional and global collaboration for global health.** The Australian network is the largest national network of its kind and housed at the Australian Global Health Alliance.

How the Network can respond to the challenges faced in our region

The Australian Network of WHOCCs is still largely under-utilised by the Government and there is a great opportunity to leverage the diverse and in-depth expertise and capability of the WHOCCs.

There is a **wide global reach of the Australian WHOCC Network**, as Australia-based WHOCCs work across at a minimum of 68 countries, including countries in Europe, Africa, Asia as well as North, South and Central America. However, being located in Australia, the international work conducted by the WHOCCs is concentrated within the Western Pacific region: At least 23 centres work in the Pacific Islands, 15 work in Vietnam, 13 work in China and 12 work in Fiji. As a group, the Network can offer a wealth of knowledge and experience globally and in our region to support to the Federal Government. These WHOCCs do not receive funding from WHO for operations and rely on a variety of sources to maintain their functions. It is therefore crucial for WHOCCs and their in-country partners to have sustainable, long-term funding for global health initiatives. We therefore call for the international development policy to recognise the importance of investing in health and providing budget for continuation of this work through the WHOCCs.

The Australian Network of WHOCCs **have strong, unique and trusting partnerships in the region**. As part of its role strengthening linkages and cooperation between WHO Collaborating Centres, WHO and government, the Australian Network of WHOCCs regularly participates in regional and global health meetings, workshops and other activities. These partnerships and trusting relationships are essential for Australia in working with country ministries of health, WHO offices and organisations to understand unique challenges in the areas as well as respond in a way that is led by the communities, and most appropriate for the context.

Promoting and achieving the **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is also one of the core themes of the Australian WHOCCs' work**. The SDGs are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a blueprint adopted by all UN member states and a form the basis of the new International Development Policy. It is important to note that health is a precondition to the achievement of all of the SDGs – sustainable investment in health positively affects most of the SDGs. Australia's new international development policy should acknowledge health intersects with all development needs, particularly to climate action, poverty reduction, human rights, gender equality, disability and inclusion. As such, investment in health is essential for sustainable development. Through their cross-cutting work, the **WHOCC Network members contribute to all 17 SDGs**, with many Centres working in multiple different SDG areas. All WHOCCs contribute to Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing,



25% contribute to Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals, and around 10% contribute to Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities, Goal 4 (Quality Education) and Goal 5 (Gender Equality).

Conclusion

Health is not only a fundamental human right but an essential foundation of international development. There is a great opportunity for the Australian Government to leverage the intelligence across the WHOCCs in Australia to meet the challenges faced in our region. Individually, WHOCCs can offer much to the Federal Government; however collectively, through the Australian Network of WHOCCs, there is an untapped resource of unique, high level and diverse centres willing to work together to assist the Government and as a result capable of creating deep impact in our regions. WHOCCs represent a broad cross-section of health and a deep expertise which are essential to a stronger region, including health systems strengthening, workforce capacity building and non-communicable diseases. The excellent, trusting partnerships in the region enable appropriate community led programs, the strong ties to WHO and the WHOCCs' work across all SDGs enable alignment with the basis of new International Development Policy and the global reach of the WHOCCs showcases the high-level experience in different contexts and ability to work with countries, for their advancement. The Australian Network of WHOCCs is pleased to offer its combined expertise and advice to the Federal Government and work together to ensure greater development outcomes for Australia and the region.

Attachment: Attached is a recent "Capacity Mapping Report 2022" for the Australian Network of WHOCCs, to showcase the Network's strengths and capabilities further.