



ESSENTIAL PUBLIC HEALTH FUNCTIONS, HEALTH SYSTEMS, AND HEALTH SECURITY

Developing conceptual clarity and
a WHO roadmap for action

Essential public health functions, health systems and health security: developing conceptual clarity and a WHO roadmap for action

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Executive summary

Background

Since the first World Health Organization (WHO) list of essential public health functions (EPHFs) was published in 1998, EPHFs have been a recurring method used by WHO regions, Member States and other global health actors to help define public health competencies and chart health system reforms. In light of the differing methods and results obtained across the world over the past two decades, WHO headquarters in Geneva called on the World Federation of Public Health Associations to explore the feasibility of uniting efforts across WHO regions to develop a unified list of public health functions, the so called "A Systems Framework for Healthy Policy". Resolution WHA 69.1 provides WHO with a strong mandate to support Member States in strengthening EPHFs as the most cost-effective and sustainable way to reach key health goals which are central to achieving universal health coverage and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda. There is, however, demand from Member States and from WHO regional offices and colleagues to provide greater conceptual clarity on EPHFs in order to strengthen efforts on health systems planning and public health advocacy. To advance some of the above priorities for the global EPHF agenda, the objective of the work underlying this report was to develop a reference document on WHO policy and operational perspectives of regional approaches on EPHFs and the links with the International Health Regulations (2005) and health systems strengthening, and to provide a glossary for use in framing discussions on resilient health systems and universal health coverage.

Methods

A systematic review was carried out of all peer-reviewed and grey literature describing EPHF frameworks and experiences over the past 25 years. The analysis of this information was complemented by qualitative data gathered in key informant interviews with professionals in different regional offices and elsewhere who have worked on or are currently developing the public health agenda. The content of the different EPHF frameworks was analysed to identify common themes as well as differences. In addition, the EPHF framework of the World Federation of Public Health Associations was examined and compared with the other published frameworks.

Key findings

With regard to the different EPHF frameworks used by WHO regions, there are two relevant experiences from the early 2000s: from the Pan-American Health Organization and the Regional

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