



## Progress report on developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health

### Introduction

1. Evidence-informed policy-making is essential to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and universal health coverage, and its importance is emphasized repeatedly in WHO's global strategies, including the Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023. However, it can be challenging for countries to obtain and use high-quality evidence.
2. Over the years, WHO has taken important steps to strengthen evidence-informed policy-making in Member States. In the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, these efforts have intensified since 2015. Following a pre-Regional Committee technical discussion in October 2017, the 64th session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean once again recognized the importance of evidence-informed policy-making and in resolution EM/RC64/R.1 requested WHO to “establish regional mechanisms to support the bridging of gaps between relevant research institutions and policy-makers and the translation of research evidence into health policy statements, and support the establishment of national mechanisms”.
3. This was followed by further work that resulted in the presentation of technical paper EM/RC66/6 to the 66th session of the Regional Committee in 2019, which focused on enhancing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health, and proposed a framework for action for the Region.<sup>1</sup> In a landmark resolution (EM/RC66/R.5), the framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region was endorsed and WHO was mandated to enhance regional and national institutional capacity for use of evidence for policy development for health.<sup>2,3</sup> The technical paper and resolution were pioneering in focusing on enhancing institutional capacity at national level.
4. Following the resolution, several actions have been carried out to build capacity in the WHO Regional Office, country offices and Member States. Resolution EM/RC66/R.5 also requested WHO to report on progress made in implementing the framework to the 68th and 70th sessions of the Regional Committee.

### Progress achieved since 2019

5. This progress report highlights key activities and achievements since October 2019. Despite the challenges caused by COVID-19 pandemic, WHO has continued its work on this mandate, which includes furthering evidence-informed policy-making in emergency situations.
6. The Regional Office has expanded its capacity to provide effective support to countries by establishing an Evidence and Data to Policy unit within its Science, Information and Dissemination department. WHO has managed to provide temporary funds to support the activities of the unit (including the establishment of a regional adviser position) and is seeking longer-term solutions and financing to ensure the continuity of work in this area in the future.

<sup>1</sup> WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean technical paper EM/RC66/6 on developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 ([https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC\\_Technical\\_Papers\\_2019\\_6\\_en.pdf?ua=1](https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC_Technical_Papers_2019_6_en.pdf?ua=1)).

<sup>2</sup> WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean resolution EM/RC66/R.5 on developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC66-R5-eng.pdf?ua=1>).

<sup>3</sup> Framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/EMSID001E.pdf>).

7. As requested in resolution EM/RC66/R.5, a regional action plan for the implementation of the framework for action was developed in 2020 after in-depth consultation with regional and global experts and policy-makers and a detailed review of past experiences in the Region and beyond.<sup>1</sup>

8. Resolution EM/RC66/R.5 also envisaged the establishment of a regional network of institutions to support evidence-informed policy-making at national level. In response, WHO developed the scope of and strategy for the regional Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP) in 2020 (see Annex) and Member States were requested to nominate national institutions for NEDtP membership. The Network benefits from the support of key global and regional institutions who will contribute to meeting its objectives. Supporting institutions confirmed their commitment to the agenda at a meeting with WHO on 10 November 2020. The NEDtP will play an important role in strengthening regional and national capacity to improve the availability, quality and use of evidence for decision-making and for institutionalizing the use of evidence at national level.

9. The draft regional action plan and the NEDtP were discussed by Member State representatives at a consultative meeting attended by the Regional Director and WHO's Chief Scientist on 16 November 2020.<sup>2</sup> The regional action plan and the establishment of NEDtP received strong support from all participants, and their comments and feedback have been reflected in the regional action plan and the scope and strategies of the NEDtP.

10. The regional action plan includes strategies and activities for countries to improve national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making, and for WHO in support of this. The six strategies are to: enhance demand and advocacy for evidence-informed policy-making; enhance decision-making structures and processes for the use of evidence; enhance resources for evidence-informed policy-making; enhance WHO Regional Office capacity and output in support of evidence-informed policy-making in countries of the Region; support countries in improving national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making; and establish a regional network and support structure.

11. The first formal meeting of the NEDtP was held on 30 March 2021. Following a letter from the WHO Regional Director to ministers of health of the Region, 22 institutions from 19 countries of the Region have now joined the NEDtP as member institutions. In addition, the ministries of health of eight countries have officially nominated various departments as members. As planned, there are now 12 support institutions from the Region and beyond that will act as resources for building national and regional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making, and a Secretariat for the NEDtP has been established at the WHO Regional Office. Immediate priorities for the NEDtP will include capacity-building at national level, a focus on priority topics for regional policy brief development and providing the key normative and technical guidance required from WHO.

12. Technical work has started on developing technical guidance and tools, including: a glossary for evidence-informed policy-making; a situation analysis tool for selecting the appropriate national modalities for evidence-informed policy-making; a transferability tool for adaptation of health technology assessment studies; training packages to enhance the technical capacity of different stakeholders for evidence-informed policy-making; and an assessment of barriers and solutions for the implementation of clinical guidelines in the private sector.

13. Capacity-building activities have been undertaken and are being expanded for Member States and WHO staff, including on policy brief development (two regional events per year) and policy dialogue (once per year), and a compendium of capacity-building resources that are freely available for use through the WHO website and virtual resources for advocacy purposes are being developed for release by the end of 2021.

14. The next progress report will be submitted to the Regional Committee in 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> The action plan is being prepared for publication and will be available on the website of the WHO Regional Office in due course (<http://www.emro.who.int/ar/evidence-data-to-policy/about/about.html>).

<sup>2</sup> Summary report on the intercountry consultative meeting for the Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP) and finalizing the regional action plan for evidence-informed policy-making. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2020 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/WHOEMEDP001E-eng.pdf?ua=1>).

## **Annex. Scope of and strategies for the Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region**

### **Background**

As highlighted in Regional Committee technical paper EM/RC66/6 (1), health policies need to be based on sound evidence to ensure that they are appropriate, effective and cost-effective. Evidence-informed policy-making is therefore essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and universal health coverage, and its importance is emphasized repeatedly in WHO's current global strategy, the Thirteenth General Programme of Work 2019–2023 (GPW 13). However, it can be challenging for countries to obtain and use high-quality evidence.

Over the years, the WHO has taken important steps to strengthen evidence-informed health policy-making in countries. These efforts have intensified since 2015, and in a landmark resolution (EM/RC66/R.5) in 2019 (2), a framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region was endorsed (3), and WHO was mandated to develop an action plan to guide efforts to build capacity in and institutionalize the use of evidence for policy development at both regional and national levels.

As the Regional Committee technical paper notes, despite a significant increase in the number of research studies in the Region, there are still limitations and shortcomings in national institutional capacity and technical expertise in the systematic use of evidence-based approaches that would make health policy more effective in improving health and equity outcomes.

Resolution EM/RC66/R.5 envisaged the establishment of a regional network of institutions to support evidence-informed policy-making at national level. The network will play an important role in strengthening regional and national capacity to improve the availability, quality and use of evidence for decision-making and institutionalizing the use of evidence at national level. It will be a platform for sharing experiences between countries as well as supporting WHO programmes, in line with WHO's global and regional strategies and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **Mission statement**

The Regional Network of Institutions for Evidence and Data to Policy (NEDtP) is established to support WHO and Member States in implementing the framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (2020–2024) through:

- strengthening effective communication between key stakeholders (such as researchers and health policy-makers);
- fostering collaboration and partnerships at national, regional and global levels;
- sharing experiences and building capacity at national and institutional levels;
- producing high-quality knowledge products for health policy-making; and
- advocating for the use of evidence in all national health policies.

### **Main objectives**

- To support national evidence-informed policy-making to for health.
- To enhance regional and national technical capacity to use evidence in health policy development.
- To collaborate with Member States to enhance the use of evidence in policy development.
- To support WHO staff in the Eastern Mediterranean in efforts to enhance the use of evidence in policy development.
- To share insights and experiences in support of evidence-informed policy-making by Member States, especially those with successful institutional mechanisms for evidence-informed policy-making.
- To recognize and enhance national and regional expertise in evidence-informed policy-making.

## Structure of the NEDtP

The NEDtP will consist of the following main actors:

- Member institutions
  - 1 or 2 institutions (depending on country size) from each country of the Region.
- NEDtP Secretariat
  - This will be drawn from the Evidence and Data for Policy unit in the Science, Information and Dissemination department in the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.
- Steering Group
  - To be assigned by the WHO Regional Director .
- Supporting institutions and partners
  - Key institutions that can provide technical and material support in line with NEDtP’s mission and objectives.

## Scope of work

NEDtP members commit to active and regular participation in related activities, including participation in annual meetings of the network and active participation in teleconference calls. Membership of the network on its own does not imply regional or national regulatory or executive functions; any such roles are undertaken by member institutions based on relevant national arrangements and processes. WHO will provide technical support, capacity-development and secretariat functions to the network.

## Selection of member institutions to join NEDtP

Member institutions should be located in countries of the Region and nominated for membership of the NEDtP by the relevant national ministry of health. Proposed institutions should meet at least two of the following criteria:

- They should be academic institutions (such as major universities or schools of public health) or key policy development institutes (such as institutes of public health or national institutes for health research).
- They should be in a formal relationship with the ministry of health, either:
  - structurally linked with the ministry or having a long-term established relationship and collaboration with it; or
  - expected to play a key role in collaboration with the ministry and other key partners to enhance health policies, monitor and improve their implementation, and evaluate the impact on policies on health outcomes.
- They should have the human resource capacity and technical experience in the key steps and processes in evidence-informed policy development, such as: knowledge translation processes; conduct of policy dialogue; development of policy briefs; adaptation or development of health technology assessment reports; clinical or public health guidelines; and preparation of policy impact assessment reports.
- A track record of a collaborative approach and partnership with other related national, regional or global entities in areas of knowledge translation processes, conduct of policy dialogue, development of policy briefs, adaptation or development of health technology assessment reports, clinical or public health guidelines, or preparation of policy impact assessment reports. Such experiences should have been well documented and published.

## Main expected outcomes

By 2023, it is expected the NEDtP will play a significant role, in support of WHO and Member States, in:

- enhancing national capacity for evidence-informed policy-making;
- establishing and institutionalizing evidence-informed policy-making in countries through regulations, structures and established processes;
- enhancing advocacy and support for evidence-informed policy-making at national level;

- regular production of knowledge products, such as policy briefs for high-priority regional health issues;
- producing medium- and long-term plans for the adaptation or development of guidelines and health technology assessment reports for regional or country contexts; and
- establishing rapid response processes for context-sensitive evidence and advice in emergency settings.

## References

1. WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean technical paper EM/RC66/6 on developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 ([https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC\\_Technical\\_Papers\\_2019\\_6\\_en.pdf?ua=1](https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC_Technical_Papers_2019_6_en.pdf?ua=1)).
2. WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean resolution EM/RC66/R.5 on developing national institutional capacity for evidence-informed policy-making for health. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/RC66-R5-eng.pdf?ua=1>).
3. Framework for action to improve national institutional capacity for the use of evidence in health policy-making in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2019 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/EMSID001E.pdf>).