

DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION

A. Major Development Partners: Strategic Foci and Key Activities

1. Development assistance in the Pacific region has increased by an estimated one-third since 2004. Net official development assistance as a proportion of gross national income across the four project countries is 15.2% in Samoa, 20.1% in Tonga, 55.8% in Tuvalu, and 13.8% in Vanuatu, compared with the Pacific average estimated at 17.9% in 2019.¹

2. The major Pacific development partners in the health sector are the governments of Australia, New Zealand, and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Other bilateral and multilateral development partners include the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund, the World Bank, the European Union, and the World Health Organization (WHO).

3. The Government of Australia funds several Pacific countries through regional and bilateral health programs in partnership with various development partners and ministries of health (MOHs). The programs aim to achieve better-quality health services by (i) improving the health of women and children, (ii) providing family planning services to women, (iii) reducing violence against women, (iv) improving disease surveillance and response, (v) developing human resources, (vi) improving health facilities and access to health services, and (vii) reducing the prevalence of communicable and noncommunicable diseases.

4. Australia has also maintained its partnership with the United Nations Joint Program for Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn Child and Adolescent Health (2015–2019) in Kiribati, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu in helping the governments improve health outcomes for women and children through better policies, and stronger systems for planning, budgeting, and monitoring. Other Australia-supported programs include the formation of the Pacific Community Public Health Division to improve disease surveillance and response, prevent and control noncommunicable diseases, and improve clinical services across the region (2017–2020); Royal Australasian College of Surgeons—Pacific Island Program's deployment of volunteer visiting medical teams to deliver and coordinate specialist and essential services (2016–2021); supporting the Fiji National University College of Medicine, Nursing, and Health Sciences in addressing diverse health workforce training needs; partnerships through International Planned Parenthood Federation to improve access to sexual and reproductive health (2019–2022); the World Bank Pacific Facility Trust Fund to help the health ministries in Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu to strengthen planning and budget implementation towards equitable health sector resource allocation (2018–2022); and the Pacific Medicines Testing Program—Therapeutic Goods Administration to help improve the quality and safety of medicines by helping Pacific countries access Australian medicines testing facilities (2017–2021).

5. The Government of New Zealand provides 60% of its funding to the Pacific countries with a focus on making the most of economic development opportunities, alleviating continuing hardship, supporting health sector abilities to deliver high quality services for better outcomes in the communities, and building resilience to climate change and natural disasters.² It supports capacity building, primary health care strengthening, and human resource development. New Zealand also supports country ministries of health in delivering health sector plans, such as

¹ World Bank Development Indicators. 2019. Net ODA received as % of GNI. Washington, DC. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DY.ODA.ODAT.GN.ZS?locations=S2> (accessed 16 March 2021)

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Government of New Zealand. 2019. *Our work in the Pacific*. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/aid-and-development/our-aid-partnerships-in-the-pacific/regional-initiatives/> (accessed 17 Mar 2021).

implementation of the Measles Recovery Plan in Samoa and providing specialist health services in the Cook Islands, and sustained humanitarian support to disasters and emergencies.

6. The PRC is growing its health sector support across the Pacific region. China Aid predominantly supports health infrastructure projects, visiting specialist teams, and medical equipment procurement.³ Medical specialist teams support the main hospitals in Samoa and Tonga via the clinician exchange program, under which local doctors also receive specialist training abroad. Most recently, China has been providing medical supplies, training local doctors, constructing isolation wards, and providing other resources to Pacific countries, including Samoa and Vanuatu, to help brace for a coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak.

7. UNICEF supports the MOHs to strengthen health systems, maximize immunization coverage, and develop policies and financing to safeguard health of children and women through technical assistance on immunization, maternal and child health services, procurement, and cold chain management.⁴ This includes the procurement of vaccines and immunization supplies (both through government and donor funds); service delivery and outreach through Reaching Every District; supply chain strengthening (both through investment in cold chain systems and capacity building of human resources); advocacy and communications, program management, data collection and analysis. Australia, Gavi, UNICEF, and WHO also supported the introduction of new vaccines to Pacific island countries, such as the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and vaccines against human papilloma virus, rotavirus, polio, rubella, and mumps.⁵

8. UNICEF founded its Vaccine Independence Initiative in 1991 to help overcome procurement and financing problems faced by national vaccine programs and has been providing pooled procurement and bridge-financing support to 13 Pacific island countries since 1995, among them Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The Vaccine Independence Initiative mechanism plays a key role in ensuring vaccine security in the region and helps countries to finance their own vaccines and immunization supplies by offering purchasing power, flexible financing, regional buffer stocks, and WHO-prequalified medical products.

9. WHO provides technical support on health policy development, health security, human resources for health, health service delivery, vaccine-preventable disease control, and health information systems. In Samoa and Tonga, WHO assisted the development of eHealth and is supporting improvements to their health information systems, such as civil registration and vital statistics, a district health information system, and vaccine-preventable disease surveillance in Tuvalu. It monitors immunization coverage in collaboration with UNICEF, and is also working on eliminating polio, measles, and rubella; controlling hepatitis B; and strengthening laboratory performance. WHO continues to work closely with partners to ensure the Pacific are well prepared to respond to the threat of COVID-19 and to mitigate negative health and socioeconomic impacts.⁶

10. Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands have received additional support for their immunization programs from external donors such as Gavi (footnote 5), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), or Rotary Foundation, which helped them introduce new vaccines, procure new cold chain equipment, and update their health systems. Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu, however, are

³ Lowy Institute. 2017. *Reports on Understanding Chinese Foreign Aid*. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/issues/chinese-foreign-aid> (accessed 15 July 2017).

⁴ UNICEF Pacific Islands. 2020. *Health and nutrition*. <https://www.unicef.org/pacificislands/what-we-do/health-and-nutrition> (accessed 05 Oct 2020).

⁵ Gavi, the vaccine alliance, supports low-income countries in introducing vaccines. <https://www.gavi.org>.

⁶ World Health Organization. 2020. *COVID-19 response in the Pacific Islands*. <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19/covid-19-in-the-pacific> (accessed 05 Oct 2020).

classified as middle-income countries and are not eligible for Gavi support,⁷ which is why they have not yet introduced pneumococcal conjugate vaccine and the human papilloma virus and rotavirus vaccines in their immunization programs.

11. Development partners have acted swiftly to support the Pacific Islands in mitigating the impact of COVID-19. The pandemic's scale and magnitude threatens to overwhelm health systems of Pacific countries that are at a disadvantage to provide the needed emergency preparedness and response measures. Support for COVID-19 has come in the form of technical assistance (mainly from WHO and UNICEF), medical supplies support (from governments of Australia, New Zealand and the PRC, and ADB and World Bank) and budget support from ADB.

12. WHO and UNICEF have led in the provision of technical support through policy guidance and guidance for program implementation related to immunization, including recruitment of technical experts and consultants deployed at in-country Ministries of Health. UNICEF has also provided support for procurement of vaccination equipment and cold-chain supplies.

13. Australia has committed A\$1 million to support the WHO Pacific Action Plan for 2019 Novel Coronavirus Preparedness and Response to strengthen infectious disease detection and response. Through its Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia has also prioritized provision of GeneXpert test cartridges to enable in-country testing across the Pacific. Supply and logistics support has also been given through provision of personal, protective equipment (PPE) for frontline health workers and funding for technical and medical staff (in medical facilities and MOH). This includes mobilization of specialists to support preparedness efforts including pathology, infection prevention and control, and epidemiology. On improving access to COVID-19 vaccines, Australia has committed A\$80 million to the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation COVAX Facility Advance Market Commitment to improve vaccine access for Pacific and Southeast Asian countries, as well as an additional A\$523.2 million to support the Regional Vaccine Access and Health Security Initiative (2020-23), and A\$100.0 million set aside within Australia's Official Development Assistance budget in 2021. Australia has also established an A\$307.7 million COVID-19 Response package, including budget support measures, to enable Pacific partner governments to maintain essential services.

14. New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has committed NZ\$1 million to support the WHO Pacific Action Plan for 2019 Novel Coronavirus Preparedness and Response. This includes support to WHO-led procurement of essential laboratory supplies for Pacific countries to undertake COVID-19 testing. New Zealand has also tapped its own country suppliers to provide PPE for potential distribution to Pacific Island countries through the regional stockpile. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade is also developing contingency plans for future deployment of additional human resources and supplies. On improving access to COVID-19 vaccines, New Zealand has committed to donate vaccines purchased bilaterally to Tokelau, Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu, should the governments requests for them.

15. ADB has coordinated with its Pacific developing member countries for COVID-19 Emergency Response grants through the Asia Pacific Disaster Response Fund.⁸ ADB has also mobilized procurement of PPE, test kits, and other essential supplies through pooled procurement with WHO/UNICEF (for Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu).

⁷ Gavi, the vaccine alliance. 2018. *Eligibility criteria at Gross National Income per capita of US\$1,580 or below.* <https://www.gavi.org/support/sustainability/countries-eligible-for-support/> (accessed July 2018).

⁸ ADB. [Regional: COVID-19 Emergency Response.](#)

B. Institutional Arrangements and Processes for Development Coordination

16. Since the outbreak of COVID-19 partners have been meeting at least weekly to discuss updates and align support through the Joint Incident Management Team meetings, chaired by WHO Pacific, with subgroups to coordinate on specific technical areas of support. The vaccines pillar is currently being established to coordinate the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine at the operational level, including discussions around readiness assessments and technical support. This includes early discussions with Pacific island countries to identify priority gaps, needs and issues in planning for COVID-19 vaccine procurement, access and delivery. Development partners are also part of the partner coordination pillar to share opportunities for collaboration and financial support for vaccines as well as information sharing on COVID-19 vaccine initiatives. Under the health operation and technical expertise pillar, partners have also collaborated towards webinars for technical support to COVID-19 management. Under the operational support and logistics pillar, partners have provided medical equipment, expansive testing through GeneXpert distribution, and transport of supplies and humanitarian flights.

17. Development partners in the Pacific continue to discuss their health sector operations at the quarterly Quints meetings, annual Pacific Heads of Health meeting hosted by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, and the biennial Pacific Health Ministers Meeting hosted by WHO. As part of the 1995 Yanuca Island Declaration, health ministers across the Pacific are committed to the Healthy Islands vision and universal health coverage by 2030.

18. In 2004, the Pacific Immunization Program Strengthening meeting was established to coordinate technical and financial support for national immunization programs across the Pacific. The meeting has stalled since 2013, but has reconvened again as the Pacific Immunization Programme Managers Meeting in July 2018, with support from UNICEF. Development agencies usually include Australia and New Zealand, CDC, Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, WHO, UNICEF, and the Pacific MOHs.

C. Achievements and Issues

19. Pacific countries have had some successes in introducing new vaccines and immunizing their people against vaccine-preventable diseases, including a significant reduction in or complete eradication of polio. Hepatitis B infections among children were also substantially reduced.

D. Summary and Recommendations

20. At present, Australia's sector-wide approach mechanism provides a common framework for development partners collaboration under the leadership of Pacific MOHs.⁹ Given the many maternal and child health initiatives in the region, coordination is paramount. The regional health meetings would be an ideal platform to coordinate between development partners and minimize transaction costs, improve responsiveness, manage policy issues, provide greater support for reforms, and promote stronger accountability to achieve better development impact.

21. As the regions develops, other Pacific countries may lose eligibility for Gavi support or need additional support under new bilateral agreements. Initial discussions with representatives from the CDC, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Nauru all revealed an interest in a potential Phase II of the regional vaccines project. By enabling more Pacific countries access to the regional procurement of new vaccines and cold chain equipment, the region could benefit from economies of scale and the sharing of best practices, similar to the Revolving Fund of the Pan American Health Organization.

⁹ Mott Macdonald. 2016. *Strengthening Development Partner Support to Immunization Programs in the Pacific*. London.