

Seventy-ninth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia

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Agenda item 8.2

Accelerating the last mile: A people-centred multidisease elimination approach for the WHO South-East Asia Region

The International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing over 30 million nurses worldwide, strongly supports a people-centred, multidisease approach to elimination in the South-East Asia Region.

The last mile of elimination is walked by nurses and the community health workers they train and supervise in primary health care, who find the last cases of kala-azar, leprosy, lymphatic filariasis, measles and malaria, and who hold the community trust on which case-finding, treatment completion and surveillance depend. The Region's elimination successes, including malaria elimination in Maldives, Sri Lanka and, most recently, Timor-Leste, alongside important neglected tropical disease milestones, have relied on strong frontline and community-based services. Fragmented, disease-specific delivery can duplicate work and stretch already constrained health workforces. Well-designed integration can reduce duplication, strengthen surveillance and make scarce workforce capacity go further.

ICN also welcomes the recommendation to strengthen whole-of-government coordination across health, WASH, housing, education and agriculture, and to deepen community engagement in addressing shared social and environmental determinants. Nurses are particularly well placed to contribute to this work. As health educators and professionals working across primary care and communities, they support families on safe water, housing, nutrition and disease prevention in the course of ordinary care, and their sustained relationships with patients, families, communities and other parts of the health system position them to help connect health services with schools, local government and community organizations. Well trained and well supported, nurses can help hold multidisease

elimination together at community level. ICN's PHC work specifically supports stronger community engagement, nurse-led care coordination and integrated multidisciplinary primary health care.

ICN urges Member States to build the multidisease approach on nurse-led integrated service delivery within primary health care; to back task-sharing with what makes it safe and sustainable: clear roles and authority, sound training, appropriate regulation and supportive supervision; to identify, plan, cost and monitor the elimination workforce in national roadmaps; and to include frontline nurses in the design and governance of elimination programmes.

Elimination is ultimately a relationship between a health system and the hardest-to-reach household. Nurses are a critical part of sustaining that relationship. ICN looks forward to working with WHO and Member States to strengthen it.