

**Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention  
on the Prohibition of the Development,  
Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological  
(Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their  
Destruction**

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**2019 Meeting**

Geneva, 3-6 December 2019

**Meeting of Experts on Assistance, Response, and Preparedness****Geneva, 6-7 August 2019**

Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**Exploration of approaches by which States Parties, individually or collectively,  
might contribute to the strengthening of international response capabilities  
for infectious disease outbreaks, whether natural or deliberate in origin**

**Update on Australia's Health Security Initiative for the Indo-  
Pacific region: Strengthening regional response capabilities  
for infectious disease outbreaks**

**Submitted by Australia**

## **I. Background**

1. There are several key factors important in building and retaining the ability to respond in a timely and coordinated fashion to natural or deliberate infectious disease threats. These factors include Parties having well-equipped laboratories, functional surveillance systems able to detect and report diseases of importance, and a skilled workforce across the spectrum of laboratory, epidemiology and clinical care. Australia is working with our region through the Indo-Pacific Health Security Initiative to build strong, integrated and responsive systems. This paper provides an update on the working paper submitted by Australia for the 2018 Meetings of Experts (BWC/MSP/2018/MX.4/WP.6), highlighting the activities that the Health Security Initiative is currently supporting to strengthen health systems in the Indo-Pacific region. The Initiative also supports implementation of Australia's BWC Article VII and Article X obligations in the Indo-Pacific region.

## **II. Introduction**

2. Globally, epidemics and emerging or re-emerging infections are threatening population health as well as adversely impacting on travel and trade in our increasingly interconnected world. **The diagnosis and management of any infectious disease starts with an accurate laboratory test reported in a timely fashion.** Inadequate laboratory services and ineffective surveillance can lead to, amongst other adverse outcomes, unnecessary expenditures in resource-poor settings; inability to determine the true prevalence of disease; ineffective treatment particularly in terms of inappropriate use of antibiotics; increased but avoidable mortality and morbidity.

3. Hence, well-equipped laboratories paired with functional surveillance systems and a skilled and capable workforce are essential for the detection and management of disease



whether for routine public health or for epidemic response. Early detection and management of disease outbreaks – whether natural or deliberate in origin - can only be accomplished if **responsive systems** are in place. Enhancing international detection and response capabilities for infectious disease outbreaks are an important mechanism to strengthen implementation of the BWC given the same capabilities would be required to respond to a deliberate event. This is of direct relevance to MX4, with its focus on assistance, response and preparedness and the exploration of approaches by which States Parties might contribute to the strengthening of international response capabilities for infectious disease outbreaks.

### III. The Australian Government's Indo-Pacific Health Security Initiative

4. In October 2017, the then Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, The Hon Julie Bishop MP, launched the Australian Government's Health Security Initiative for the Indo-Pacific region with funding of A\$300 million over five years. The Initiative aims to contribute to the avoidance and containment of emerging and re-emerging infectious disease threats with the potential to cause social and economic harms on a national, regional or global scale. Such threats might be either natural or deliberate in origin.

5. The Initiative aims to inform **evidence-based planning**, help prevent avoidable epidemics, **strengthen early detection capacity**, and **support rapid, effective national and international outbreak responses**. It will meet these objectives by accelerating research on new drugs and diagnostics, expanding partnerships at the national, regional and global level to strengthen human and animal health systems, and deepening people-to-people linkages that build national and regional health security capacity.

6. In 2018, the Centre conducted scoping missions across the Indo-Pacific region by independent health security experts, who reported on recommendations for investments under Australia's Health Security Initiative. Laboratory strengthening was identified as a key need across the region. The Initiative is now investing in laboratory 'twinning' whereby laboratories in the region will be assisted and mentored by high-quality laboratories in Australia. The Centre recently funded a twinning arrangement between the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) and veterinary laboratories in Indonesia (Wates, Central Java) and Myanmar (Yangon and Mandalay). AAHL is the largest biocontainment laboratory in Australia and is dedicated to diagnosis of and research into emergency animal and zoonotic diseases. AAHL's high containment diagnostic laboratory responds to outbreaks of emergency animal diseases, protecting the nation against biosecurity threats and has roles in test development and validation. Under the twinning arrangement, AAHL will provide training and mentoring in areas identified as requiring strengthening either through voluntary Joint External Evaluations or the Centre's scoping missions. Furthermore, AAHL will host biosafety professionals from across the region for biosafety and biosecurity training to assist in improving pathogen security in their home institutions.

7. Additional laboratory twinning and networking activities are in the process of being considered through a recent funding call from the Centre and will provide additional opportunities for laboratory strengthening across the Indo-Pacific region for public health and animal health laboratories. Most importantly, these programs aim to promote long term sustainability beyond the lifespan of the Health Security Initiative through focusing on human capacity and building stronger networks across the region.

8. The Initiative also provides funding for Product Development Partnerships to develop innovative treatments and diagnostics for malaria and tuberculosis, as well as vector control for mosquito-borne diseases. In addition, the Initiative supports a new Health Security Fellows Program for students in the ASEAN region to receive a world-class post-graduate qualification in field epidemiology in collaboration with hands-on training via a public health placement in their country. These integrated activities serve to develop skills at country level and facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences for the rapid detection and response of public health events of potential international concern.

9. The Centre has contributed funds to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), a global alliance financing and coordinating the development of

vaccines against infectious diseases, including high priority diseases of relevance to the Indo-Pacific region.

10. The Centre has also made contributions to a number of funds that assist in response and preparedness efforts for infectious diseases, including the WHO Health Emergencies Program, the World Bank Pandemic emergency financing facility and the WHO contingency fund for emergencies. These contributions will support ongoing efforts to prepare and respond to infectious disease outbreaks.

## **IV. Conclusion**

11. Australia's BWC-related cooperation and assistance makes a strong contribution to public health and disease prevention, surveillance and detection, international cooperation in the biological sciences and improvements in biosafety and biosecurity. The Initiative also demonstrates Australia's commitment to the BWC, particularly with regard to the implementation of Article VII and Article X via the provision of capacity-building support at country level in the Indo-Pacific region.

12. Whether a disease outbreak is natural or deliberate, effective detection and response will require strong surveillance systems, laboratories that can run the correct tests, and a skilled workforce able to respond quickly with appropriate action. This BWC experts meeting can help us to strengthen responsiveness by sharing experiences, lessons learned and best practice. Key programmes such as Australia's Health Security Initiative demonstrate how enhanced international cooperation and assistance for public health capacity and response can also help reinforce the security objectives of the BWC.

## **V. References**

13. International Health Regulations (2005), 2nd edition. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2005.

See also: [http://www.who.int/topics/international\\_health\\_regulations/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/international_health_regulations/en/)

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