

## Epidemic Intelligence Working Group Background and Purpose

Established by the United Nations in 2015, Sustainable Development Goal 3 is ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being. To achieve this, there is an ongoing need to strengthen capacity to rapidly detect and respond to potentially adverse health events, such as epidemics and environmental disasters. Strengthening of surveillance for epidemic prone diseases is a priority for both International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR) and the Global Health Security Agenda (GHS). As observed during 2020, countries have used and adapted existing data systems to detect, monitor and respond to their COVID-19 outbreaks. Building upon this experience and the lessons learned to further enhance and integrate such systems and the data they collect for use in detecting and responding to future outbreaks as well as for accelerating progress to the SDGs will be critical.

Key to those efforts is the need for a comprehensive picture of the threat through timely gathering of useful information to gain enhanced Epidemic Intelligence (EI) in order to make an appropriate decision about how to respond. EI is defined as the systematic collection, analysis and communication of any information to predict, detect, verify, assess and investigate events and health risks with an early warning objective.<sup>i</sup> This entails assimilating data from multiple formal and informal sources such as indicator based surveillance and event based surveillance, and from multiple sectors—human, animal and environmental.

The Epidemic Intelligence Working Group (EIWG) seeks to bring together technical experts and implementing partners in the areas of detection and response to public health events to apply the HDC principle of improving health outcomes through improved use of quality data by enhancing epidemic intelligence at the local through global levels. While some progress has been made on the national, regional and global levels, the beginning and end of the surveillance continuum still need support. Recognizing gaps in EI, identifying potential solutions, and supporting implementation, particularly at national and subnational levels, are key goals of this group to support a smooth flow of information for timely response.

## Aim and Objectives

### ***Aim***

To improve Epidemic Intelligence for enhanced detection and response to events of public health concern

### ***Objectives***

1. Create opportunities for collaboration to foster improvement of investments in surveillance and health information systems for meeting International Health Regulations around outbreak detection and response.
2. Assist participating countries in developing strategies for better data quality and use for early outbreak detection and rapid response.
3. Develop specific strategies for coordinating resources towards building capacity for better use of data for responding to public health events at subnational levels.
4. Contribute technical expertise in the areas of data standardization, data harmonization and interoperability of Health Information Systems/solutions to other global initiatives with the aim to merge information from multiple sources, including from human, animal and environmental health (One Health approach)

## Scope of Work/Activities 2021-2023

### **Global**

1. Contribute to WHO norms and standards for detecting and managing responses for public health events of concern
  - a. Identify and promote interoperable data standards
  - b. Contribute to a common set of data integration and analytic platforms and tools
  - c. Support a universal concept for data integration and use across multiple sectors per the One Health approach (human, animal and environment)
  - d. Consider the aspect of data security and confidentiality in the context of EI (e.g. data governance and data use agreements)
2. Identify and connect initiatives that compile EI relevant data on national, regional or global level and promote global agreements and standards on data sharing and data use for epidemic control.
3. Promote data privacy and data security in the context of Epidemic Intelligence
4. Leveraging on existing processes facilitate consensus on global public goods and attain buy-in of implementing partners to disseminate and use standardized methods and tools.
5. Identify and coordinate with other groups facilitating related initiatives around detection and response.

### **Country**

1. Promote adoption of WHO norms and standards at country level through facilitating multi-partner buy-in and coordination for implementing standardized methods and tools
2. Assist priority countries\* in developing specific strategies that focus on scaling digital tools, improving data quality attributes of timeliness\*\* and completeness (e.g. integrating various data sources)
3. Support efforts to strengthen capacity to implement standardized systems for improved detection and response to public health threats including multisector approaches (e.g. provide guidance for establishing early detection, warning and response systems)
4. Support efforts of regional and cross-border cooperation around data sharing and data harmonization

*\*Priority countries in 2021 are Nepal, Malawi, Kenya and Uganda, with a subsequent focus on other member countries: Tanzania, Uganda, Cameroon, Botswana, Sri Lanka and Myanmar*

*\*\*WHO Impact Measurement Framework health emergencies emergency detect and respond indicator*

## Deliverables 2021-2023

1. Identification of multi-lateral and priority country-specific stakeholders and implementing partners investing around surveillance, data integration, and program implementation for detection and response to public health events of international concern
2. Establishment of group/sub-group core areas through solutions focused dialogues on:
  - a. Increasing epidemic intelligence through improving data quality and use
  - b. Systems wide thinking for workforce development and training at subnational levels
  - c. Technologies for data capture, integration and exchange
  - d. Financial strategies to enhance sustainability
  - e. Stakeholder alignment for sustainable joint action
3. Contribution to the development of a normative document published through WHO to be a single source of guidance for the data and analytic standards for detecting public health events of international concern and managing responses and relevant methods and tools

- a. Reference will be a guide for countries to improve their national surveillance systems for early outbreak detection and rapid response
  - b. Focus will be on indicator and event-based surveillance
  - c. Emphasis will be placed on integration and use of diverse data sources from multiple sectors.
4. Dissemination of guidance document to member countries to assist in establishment of framework for application of standards

## Membership and Leadership

Membership is open to representatives from all 7 HDC constituencies and other working groups, from global to country level participants, and is encouraged to represent diverse skillsets and perspectives around detection and response to public health events. Two co-chairs elected by EIWG members will lead the EIWG and serve for two years, with the possibility of extending by one year, in consultation with the SRG.

## Modus Operandi

EIWG meeting frequency will be ultimately determined by members and may change depending on the needs of the members but will commence with monthly recurrence. Ultimately, the EIWG deliverables and work plan are accountable to the SRG. Accordingly, the EIWG will:

- ensure coordination and links with other HDC WGs to align activities and products. The EIWG co-chairs will represent the EIWG in monthly HDC SRG calls, monthly WG co-chair calls and other HDC related meetings to ensure coordination; and
- engage with HDC focus countries, in coordination with the secretariat and SRG.
- As with other HDC WGs, if funding is required to implement activities and is in alignment with EIWG and HDC objectives, support could be considered through the HDC approved work plan (esp. for direct in-country support in line with this scope and the working group's global goods, that work may be included).

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2014). Early detection, assessment and response to acute public health events: implementation of early warning and response with a focus on event-based surveillance: interim version. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/112667>