

WEBINAR: WATER AND SANITATION TECHNOLOGY OPTIONS FOR HEALTH-CARE FACILITIES, 2024 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

During the UN 2023 Water Conference, the United Nations Secretary-General urged the global community to respect, protect and share water for the benefit of people and the planet. The conference highlighted the importance of recognizing water as a global common good, ensuring universal access to safe drinking-water and sanitation, and utilizing water as a catalyst for health and well-being, nutrition and energy. Numerous countries pledged increased investments in water infrastructure as well as improved access to safe water and sanitation services. The conference also emphasized the need for capacity-building, technology transfer, innovations to solve the water crisis and knowledge sharing.

In a resolution on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in health-care facilities adopted at the Seventy-second World Health Assembly in 2019, global targets were established calling for at least 80% of all health-care facilities globally to have basic WASH services by 2025 and 100% by 2030. Considering this target, some Member States still require support to expedite progress towards these targets. Innovation in practice and technologies can serve as an accelerator, leading to improved water resources and sanitation development and management. By sharing and disseminating research and technologies, an enabling environment can be created for new and sustainable solutions that ensure full coverage of water and sanitation services. Focus should be placed on designing tailored solutions considering each location's unique context, ranging from scaling up best practices, leveraging accessible and disruptive technologies relevant to the assessed scenario, to incorporating ecological and traditional approaches to accelerate progress and ensure that no one is left behind.

Objectives

The World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Western Pacific organized a webinar on Water and Sanitation Technology Options for Health-care Facilities, hosted by the Republic of Korea, on 14 March 2024. The objectives of the meeting were:

- to enhance participants' understanding of the significance of water and sanitation technologies in health-care facilities towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of safe drinking-water and sanitation for all;
- to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and best practices in water and sanitation technologies suitable for use in health-care facilities;
- to contribute to enhancing the capacity of participants in understanding, evaluating and adopting appropriate water and sanitation technologies in health-care facilities;
- to emphasize the concept of technology assessment and its relevance in the context of water and sanitation requirements for health-care facilities;



- to foster collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders, including Member States in the Western Pacific Region; and
- to present the provisional list of proposed technologies and share it with Member States of the Western Pacific Region.

Conclusions

The webinar was organized into two parts. Part one was a presentation on selecting water and sanitation technologies for health-care facilities in the Western Pacific Region; part two was a discussion session with selected experts from fund agencies.

Part 1: Selecting water and sanitation technologies for health-care facilities in the Western Pacific Region

- Many countries in the Western Pacific Region still have low coverage for water and sanitation, including for health-care facilities, which have unique requirements. There is also a notable gap in decision-making resources, as highlighted by a 2021 World Bank review that pointed out the lack of available tools to support well-informed decisions on water and sanitation technology options for health-care facilities. To address these gaps, the WHO Asia-Pacific Centre for Environment and Health in the Western Pacific Region (ACE) and the University of Technology Sydney conducted comprehensive research activities, including literature reviews, country consultations, framework design, guidance development and meetings with Member States.
- Guidance has been developed aimed at facilitating informed decision-making regarding suitable water and sanitation technology choices for health-care facilities. The guidance comprises three primary components: institutional factors (e.g. public sector investment capacity, planning for climate change), technology factors (e.g. construction requirements, operational needs), and site and environmental factors (a nested system encompassing health-care facility needs, human environment dynamics and the natural environment).
- To operationalize these factors, tables were structured within a decision-making framework and detailed fact sheets created for various technologies. The guidance underscores crucial management practices to ensure safety, cost reduction and water resource conservation. Moreover, climate resilience considerations are integrated into the guidance, providing design features to bolster the resilience of water and sanitation technologies against climate-related risks in the Western Pacific Region.

Part 2: Discussion session with experts from fund agencies

- Panellists from the World Bank, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) shared insights on water and sanitation services in health-care facilities, aiming to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration with participants. They discussed lessons learnt and key recommendations to enhance implementation and scaling up of innovations in this domain.



Challenges and opportunities in implementing and scaling up best practices and relevant innovations in water and sanitation within health-care facilities:

- Concerns were raised regarding the financing gap and significant data gap in some countries/areas in the Western Pacific Region, as well as challenges related to institutionalization and ownership by national authorities.
- Long-term sustainability is a primary concern and the necessity of creating an enabling environment for sustainability was emphasized, highlighting the role of public participation and innovative financing mechanisms, alongside traditional financial considerations.
- Insights were provided regarding internal strategies employed by organizations to better support clients, including the breakdown of internal silos to facilitate communication and information sharing among primary clients, and effective presentation of data to inform decision-making processes.

Key considerations for policy-makers and decision-makers in investment and technology transfer decisions for water and sanitation services in health-care facilities:

- Key considerations included the importance of addressing local needs and context, lack of data in health-care facilities and financing for sustainability, which emerged as a crucial requirement.
- Solutions should be tailored to address present and future needs, considering potential changes such as climate risks and population growth. Community involvement is critical to ensure that solutions are aligned with local requirements and communities possess the capacity and willingness to adopt, operate and maintain the technology.
- Understanding the concept of climate resilience in a local context can be challenging. It was suggested that local manifestations need to be carefully considered and resilience strengthened through partnerships and collaboration efforts.

How can collaboration and partnerships among technology providers, policy-makers, researchers, donor agencies, partners and practitioners be strengthened to accelerate progress towards global water and sanitation targets in health-care facilities?

- Various initiatives have been undertaken, encompassing not only financial aspects but also operational and sustainability considerations. Long-term funding strategies and proactive identification of capacity-building needs will ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing challenges.
- Private sector involvement is necessary and will require delineation of stakeholder roles, aligning of objectives and establishing of common targets, with effective communication being paramount in fostering collaboration.
- Operational researchers in health-care systems provide diverse perspectives and can navigate the organizational challenges of



facilitating private sector engagement. Cautious consideration of such engagements was advised due to their specialized nature.

Recommendations for Member States

Member States are encouraged to consider the following:

- (1) Prioritize improving coverage of water and sanitation services in health-care facilities. Recognize the significant role of politics in determining priorities and allocating resources. Policy-makers should prioritize investment in water and sanitation infrastructure in health-care facilities to address public health needs effectively.
- (2) Adopt a long-term perspective when planning for water and sanitation services in health-care facilities, considering future needs, such as climate risks and population growth, and ensuring sustainability in financing and operations.
- (3) Actively involve communities in the decision-making process to ensure that solutions are aligned with local needs and preferences. Community engagement fosters ownership and enhances the sustainability of water supply and sanitation infrastructure.
- (4) Focus on strengthening institutional capacity to make well-informed decisions regarding water and sanitation technology options for health-care facilities, including investing in resources and tools necessary for decision-making.

Recommendations for WHO Secretariat

WHO is requested to do the following:

- (1) Facilitate collaboration and partnerships among technology providers, policy-makers, researchers, donor agencies, partners and practitioners, including aligning objectives, establishing common targets and fostering effective communication channels.
- (2) Provide technical assistance to Member States in implementing water and sanitation projects, including the selection of appropriate technologies and management practices.
- (3) Support Member States in developing long-term funding strategies to ensure sustainable financing for water and sanitation projects in health-care facilities.
- (4) Facilitate knowledge exchange and dissemination of best practices in water and sanitation technology selection and implementation among Member States, promoting innovation and continuous improvement in health-care facilities.
- (5) Proactively anticipate and identify capacity-building needs among Member States to enhance their capability to make informed decisions regarding water and sanitation technologies.

