Conditions for Resilient Communities; Applying Public Health Approaches to the Emergency Management Continuum

January 18, 2024

On January 18, 2024, IANPHI co-hosted a webinar on "Conditions for Resilient Communities; Applying Public Health Approaches to the Emergency Management Continuum " with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The recommendations in the [2023 Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) of Canada's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada](#) provided a platform to promote the sharing of best practices with IANPHI Members and Partners.

From COVID-19 to extreme weather events, emergencies are becoming a part of our daily lives. With this reality comes a shift in how we think about preparing for emergencies by looking beyond immediate response efforts. Effective emergency management must prioritize health equity, community engagement, and influence social structures that can withstand shocks. Health promotion approaches, founded on addressing the social determinants of health, can pull these mechanisms together to guide a stronger public health and emergency response approach. National Public Health Institutes (NPHIs) are well-placed to advocate for an intersectoral, systematic way forward, to create conditions for resilient communities before, during, and after emergencies. Under the moderation of Dr. Tracey Cooper, Chief Executive of [Public Health Wales](#) and IANPHI Executive Board Member, this webinar discussed vital aspects of public health in emergencies.

Panelists:

- Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada from the [Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)](#) and IANPHI Executive Board Member
- Dr. Celia Alpuche Aranda, Director of Research Center for Infectious Diseases at the [Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública of Mexico](#)
- Prof. Ilona Kickbusch, Founder and Chair of the [Global Health Centre (GHC)](#) at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva and Member of the [Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB)](#)
- Dr. Ayham Alomari, Senior Director Health in Emergencies - Canada and International at the [Canadian Red Cross](#)
- Prof. Sir Michael Marmot, Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London (UCL), Director of the [UCL Institute of Health Equity](#), and Past President of the [World Medical Association (WMA)](#)

Creating the Conditions for Resilient Communities: A Public Health Approach in Emergencies

By Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and IANPHI Executive Board Member

Dr. Theresa Tam opened the panel by emphasizing emergencies are increasingly becoming a part of our daily lives and nations have and will continue to experience emergencies such as extreme weather events, biological events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and conflict and war. She described how public health professionals are well-positioned to work with communities and partners across sectors to bridge two of our essential functions in public health – health promotion and emergency management. Dr. Tam reinforced the multifaceted health impacts of emergencies and their inequitable distribution through populations, underlines why emergency management is a priority for public health. These events risk having profound impacts on our physical and mental health, as well as on the well-being of our communities.

Introducing the concept of intersectionality, Dr. Tam highlighted how exposure to hazards, vulnerabilities, and resource access contribute to varying outcomes. She underscored public health's role in connecting health promotion and Emergency Management, emphasizing an equity-centered approach that builds social support and trust. For her, key opportunities for action include prioritizing communities, integrating health promotion into policies and embedding equity in Emergency Management practices.

In her conclusion, Dr. Tam discussed the significance of longitudinal data collection for monitoring long-term outcomes and policy impacts. She encouraged community engagement, offering resources for further exploration, and emphasized the collective effort needed to keep health equity at the forefront of Emergency Management initiatives.

Social and Economical Inequality Impact In Covid-19 Response

By Dr. Celia Alpuche Aranda, Director of Research Center for Infectious Diseases at the Instituto Nacional de Salud Pública of Mexico

Dr. Celia Apuche Aranda discussed the impact of social and economic inequalities on the COVID-19 response in Mexico and other Latin American countries. She highlighted the vast disparities in living conditions, employment, and healthcare access, emphasizing the challenges faced by vulnerable populations, particularly those in informal work sectors. The initial impact of the pandemic was felt more among the higher socioeconomic classes due to international travel but later disproportionately affected vulnerable populations. During lockdowns, informal workers struggled to adhere to public health recommendations as staying at home was economically unfeasible. Dr. Aranda also discussed disparities in healthcare access, citing studies that link greater marginalization to a higher risk of severe forms of COVID-19. Indigenous populations faced challenges in recognizing severity signs and accessing timely medical care, with hesitancy towards vaccination due to cultural factors.

The presentation underscored the importance of understanding and addressing social and economic inequalities in pandemic response. Dr. Aranda emphasized the need for tailored risk communication,

implementation strategies, and economic support to ensure successful adherence to public health policies. She concluded by highlighting the priority agenda to reduce inequalities for sustainable development and effective health crisis response.

The Crucial Link between Public Trust and Public Health

By Prof. Ilona Kickbusch, Founder and Chair of the Global Health Centre (GHC) at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva and Member of the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB)

Prof. Ilona Kickbush addressed the critical connection between public trust and public health. She emphasized the challenge faced during the pandemic where health issues became divisive rather than a unifying force. Therefore, or her, there is a need to link public trust and public health, especially in the context of increasing polarization and the exploitation of health issues for political gains.

In her presentation, Prof. Kickbush pointed out the importance of understanding and addressing trust as a risk factor in health, calling for research to better comprehend how to work in low trust communities and mitigate health risks associated with low public trust. She challenged the field of public health to recognize low public trust as a risk factor and develop strategies to address it effectively. Additionally, Prof. Kickbush advocated for a broader understanding of health literacy that incorporates trust, digital literacy, and science literacy. Finally, she also emphasized the role of health promotion in building trusted relationships through a settings approach, creating social infrastructures and fostering community resilience. For her, it is important to create a bold and forward-looking agenda to link public health and public trust, recognizing the political nature of the connection and its implications for broader health issues.

Communities as Agents of Change

By Dr. Ayham Alomari, Senior Director Health in Emergencies - Canada and International at the Canadian Red Cross

Dr. Ayham Alomari offered insights into the challenges and opportunities in emergency management, emphasizing the importance of community engagement and grassroots efforts. While discussing the increased frequency of infectious diseases and extreme climate events, stressing the compounding nature of these emergencies, he highlighted examples from Pakistan, Liberia, and Somalia to illustrate the importance of investing in community health workers and local capacities. The presentation underscored the need for a public health approach throughout the emergency management cycle, with a focus on risk reduction, preparedness, and recovery. Dr. Alomari reminded participants that communities are not static and to establish and maintain trust, feedback must be ongoing, two-way, and applied over the long term; not just during an emergency. He stressed that investing in communities and the resources that work for them, will empower policy, plans, preparation, and will enable appropriate responses during crisis.

Health Inequalities

By Prof. Sir Michael Marmot, Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at University College London (UCL), Director of the UCL Institute of Health Equity, and Past President of the World Medical Association (WMA)

Prof. Sir Michael Marmot delivered a presentation focusing on health inequalities and social determinants across the world. He discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on exposing societal inequalities, particularly in the context of the United Kingdom and pointed out the relationship between pre-pandemic health disparities and poor performance during the pandemic, attributing it to factors such as governance, economic inequalities, and disinvestment from public services. He emphasized the grim reality of increasing child poverty and destitution in the United Kingdom, underscoring the importance of addressing social determinants of health to tackle health inequalities. Despite the challenges, Prof. Marmot showcases initiatives undertaken by communities such as by Coventry and by Greater Manchester to address health inequalities, with a focus on collaboration between local government, health systems, the voluntary sector, and businesses. He stressed the need for central government policies that support community-led efforts and prioritize health equity. The discussion concluded with reflections on the long-term impact of child poverty and the importance of influencing government policies to invest in societal stability through measures to prevent child poverty.

Discussion

The webinar moderator, Dr. Tracey Cooper, amplified key themes expressed by panelists and drew in the experience of the participants who contributed to the chat environment. The discussion covered various aspects related to managing the infodemic during emergencies, engaging communities, and preparing young people for challenges. The speakers emphasized the importance of trust, transparency, and community engagement in combating misinformation and building resilience. Additionally, they highlighted the need for Public Health Institutions to develop effective social media strategies and invest in robust data systems to provide reliable information. Moreover, involving youth in decision-making processes and addressing their concerns, such as climate anxiety and disruptions to education and employment, were considered essential for creating solutions aligned with their needs. The discussion also touched upon empowering communities with necessary resources and tools to take proactive measures based on local data and insights.

Assembling an intersectoral panel from various international regions to discuss the application of health promotion approaches to influence community resilience produced thoughtful perspectives and challenged participants to consider innovate solutions. Panelists and participants underscored that communities serve as foundational elements throughout the emergency response continuum, and to maximize this potential, adequate funding and upstream policy levers must be applied.