

IANPHI Webinar on NPHI strategies: Tumultuous times and pressing strategic choices for NPHIs

November 8, 2023

On November 8, 2023, the IANPHI Europe Network hosted a webinar on “Tumultuous times and pressing strategic choices for NPHIs”. The covid-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the circumstances for many National Public Health Institutes (NPHIs). The current war in Ukraine and economic challenges reinforce the volatility of the situation alongside longer trends in emerging health threats and in technological advances. Many NPHIs have recently revised their strategy or are in the process of doing so. IANPHI Europe regional network launched, in March 2023, a survey with the goal to gather information on the most pressing strategic choices that NPHIs are currently facing. Preliminary results were presented at the European annual meeting in Lisbon in April 2023. In this webinar, expanded findings from the survey have been presented and then debated from multiple perspectives with the aim of better understanding what NPHIs worldwide should do next. Moderated by Dr. Trygve Ottersen, Executive Director, [Norwegian Institute of Public Health](#) and Chair of the IANPHI Europe Network, the session offered presentations and a discussion between panelists from the [National Public Health Institute of Mozambique](#), the [Institute of Public Health of Montenegro](#), the [National Institute of Health of Pakistan](#) and the [Public Health Agency of Canada](#).

Panelists:

- Dr. Bjørn G. Iversen, Senior Medical Officer, Norwegian Institute of Public Health
- Dr. Igor Galić, Director, Institute of Public Health, Montenegro
- Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of the Public Health Agency of Canada
- Dr. Sofia Viegas, Deputy General Director of the National Institute of Health of Mozambique
- Prof. Aamer Ikram, Former Director, National Institute of Health Pakistan

Presentation of Main Survey Findings

By Dr. Bjørn G. Iversen, Senior Medical Officer, Norwegian Institute of Public Health

Dr. Bjorn G. Iversen presented survey findings from the IANPHI Europe Network, focusing on post-pandemic strategic development processes in National Public Health Institutes. Out of 14 respondents, 12 reported ongoing strategic processes, largely triggered by lessons learned from the pandemic, financial constraints, political considerations, and changes in societal needs. While most institutes retained autonomy in their strategy processes, governmental approval was often required. Top strategic questions included policy alignment, collaboration, financing, workforce optimization, and addressing social determinants of health. Challenges encompassed prioritization, stakeholder collaboration, maintaining scientific independence, workforce optimization, and leveraging technology. Dr. Iversen concluded with an analogy to “The Wizard of Oz,” emphasizing internal solutions and the importance of collaborative problem-solving. Overall, the survey highlighted the varied challenges and priorities facing national public health institutes in Europe, with a focus on adapting to post-pandemic realities.

Viewpoint from a Member of the Europe Regional Network: Challenges faced by the Institute of Public Health of Montenegro

By Dr. Igor Galić, Director, Institute of Public Health, Montenegro

Dr. Igor Galić, began his presentation by highlighting the profound challenges faced by NPHIs, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasized the crucial role of these institutes in improving overall health systems and public health responses. He underscored the necessity of stable financing and sustainable support from governments, as many institutes rely heavily on project-based funding. Additionally, he addressed the importance of human resources, noting difficulties in attracting younger personnel to the field of public health. Dr. Galić outlined strategic priorities, including the development of preventive programs, emergency response capabilities, and digitalization of public health systems. He stressed the significance of addressing both communicable and non-communicable diseases, particularly in the context of climate change. Furthermore, Dr. Galić emphasized the role of NPHIs in providing professional and technical support to ministries of health, while maintaining independence from political influence. He highlighted the unique challenges faced by institutions in the Western Balkans, where governmental support varies, underscoring the importance of regional cooperation in disease prevention and control.

Viewpoint from Canada: Challenges faced by the Public Health Agency of Canada

By Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of the Public Health Agency of Canada

Highlighting the need for renewal, Dr. Theresa Tam emphasized the importance of maintaining core public health functions while incorporating lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. At the heart of this renewal process is the development of a new strategic plan for the agency, focused on scientific excellence, data-driven decision-making and equity. Key strategic questions include strengthening the science-to-policy continuum, enhancing data surveillance and laboratory infrastructure, championing health promotion and upstream prevention, and addressing workforce burnout while refreshing public health competencies. Dr. Tam underscored the imperative of building trust with the public and government stakeholders, especially in the context of declining trust in science and public health. She also highlighted the need for sustainable funding, technical infrastructure, and intersectoral collaboration to address the multifaceted challenges ahead.

Viewpoint from a member of the Africa regional network: Challenges faced by the National Institute of Health of Mozambique

By Dr. Sofia Viegas, Deputy General Director of the National Institute of Health of Mozambique

Dr. Sofia Viegas discussed the experience, challenges, and strategic choices aimed at strengthening the National Institute of Health of Mozambique (INS) during a webinar on national public health institute strategies in Europe. Established in 1955, INS plays a crucial role in Mozambique's health system, encompassing biomedical research, laboratory services, surveillance, emergency response, communication, education, and public health partnerships. Despite its pivotal role, INS faces

numerous challenges reflective of Mozambique's evolving public health landscape, including the heightened impact of climate change with increased cyclones, the scourge of terrorism in certain regions, population growth exceeding 34 million, and significant workforce expansion. In response to these challenges, INS has made substantial strides in technical and scientific capacities, however areas require attention for optimal functioning. INS aims to bolster its administrative structure, financial management, workforce development, quality management systems, and institutional self-sustainability. Strategies involve creating dedicated administrative directorates, enhancing financial management, improving workforce retention, strengthening quality management systems, and developing self-sustainability plans. The focus is on ensuring efficient operations, increasing capacity, and reducing reliance on external funding for long-term viability.

Viewpoint from a member of the Asia regional network: Challenges faced by the National Institute of Health of Pakistan.

By Prof. Aamer Ikram, Former Director, National Institute of Health Pakistan

Prof. Aamer Ikram began by acknowledging the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic and the subsequent opportunities it presented for strategic planning and collaboration. He underscored the global nature of infectious disease threats and the imperative for proactive measures to address emergent and re-emergent diseases, including deliberate use threats and industrial accidents with health and economic repercussions. He highlighted the lessons learned and strategies implemented during the COVID-19 crisis in Pakistan. He emphasized the importance of establishing a National Command & Operation Center (NCOC) and implementing smart lockdowns tailored to Pakistan's demographic and socioeconomic realities to manage the pandemic effectively, despite challenges in a populous country. Prof. Ikram highlighted Pakistan's achievements in testing, contact tracing, and genomic surveillance, supported by a national data center and field epidemiology workforce. He underscored the significance of regional collaboration, advanced technologies, and consistent policy implementation for global health security. He concluded with a call for continued action and collaboration to address ongoing and future health threats, underscoring the critical role of National Public Health Institutes in safeguarding public health and promoting global well-being.

Pannel Discussion

Moderated by Dr. Trygve Ottersen, Executive Director, Norwegian Institute of Public Health of the Norwegian Institute and Chair of the IANPHI Europe Network

During the panel discussion, the focus turned towards the pressing issue of workforce challenges within public health institutions. Panelists shared insights into the strategies employed by their respective institutions to tackle recruitment, retention, and support for staff.

Dr. Sofia Viegas emphasized the importance of creating a conducive work environment and offering competitive salaries to retain talent. She also highlighted the significance of providing career development opportunities and prioritizing mental health support for staff members. Additionally, she underscored the role of collaboration and networks of support in enhancing institutional resilience and response capabilities.

Prof. Aamer Ikram echoed the sentiment of collaboration, stressing the need for coordination, cooperation, and communication at national, regional, and global levels to address workforce challenges effectively. He emphasized the importance of learning from each other's experiences and leveraging strengths to bolster public health systems.

Dr. Thera Tam emphasized the need for equity, diversity, and inclusion within the public health workforce, recognizing the diverse skill sets and backgrounds necessary for effective operation. She advocated for reducing administrative burdens and fostering a supportive work culture to mitigate burnout and enhance staff well-being.

Dr. Igor Galić highlighted the need for innovative approaches to workforce development, suggesting the exploration of alternative career pathways beyond traditional medical training. He emphasized the importance of sustained financial support from governments and the establishment of collaborative networks to address shared challenges collectively.

Overall, the panelists emphasized the critical role of collaboration, supportive work environments, and strategic workforce planning in addressing the multifaceted challenges facing public health institutes.