Roadmap for WHO Regions for Health Network – together towards better health and well-being, 2024–2026
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Abstract
RHN comprises regions of countries in the WHO European Region that have significant political and administrative responsibilities in areas related to health and well-being. Since RHN's creation in 1992, the Network has influenced subnational activities in support of national, regional and local health-policy implementation, building on WHO programmes and policies. Today, through collaborative efforts, RHN supports the implementation of the three core priorities of the WHO European Programme of Work. Roadmap 2024–2026 seeks to support RHN member regions in developing a forward-looking vision that in practice would place health and well-being high on key political and technical agendas and support implementation. The Roadmap 2024–2026 was presented and adopted at the 28th RHN annual meeting in Seville (15-17 November 2023).

Keywords
ADVOCACY, HEALTH PROMOTION AND PREVENTION, NETWORKING, RESOURCE SHARING, SUBNATIONAL LEVEL, UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE

Document number: WHO/EURO:2023-8996-48768-72565

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WHO Regions for Health Network

Goal of the roadmap

Strategic objectives of RHN

Core themes
  - Promoting health and well-being at all ages and across sectors
  - Securing universal access to quality care without financial hardship
  - Protecting against health emergencies
  - Empowering health: harnessing the power of science, data, and innovation

Collaboration

References
WHO Regions for Health Network

The Regions for Health Network (RHN) comprises member regions and associated member regions of countries in the WHO European Region. Since its creation in November 1992, the Network has influenced subnational activities in support of regional and local health-policy development, building on the WHO Health-in-All-Policies approach (1), Health 2020 (2) (Box 1) and, most recently, the European Programme of Work 2020–2025 (EPW) (3). The EPW has three core priorities: (i) moving towards universal health coverage (UHC) (universal access to quality care without financial hardship); (ii) protecting against health emergencies; and (iii) promoting health and well-being (at all ages). Within the framework of the EPW’s third core priority (promoting health and well-being), RHN is identified as an initiative instrumental in supporting “local living environments that enable health and well-being” (3).

Box 1. The Göteborg Manifesto

RHN members united their voices in the Göteborg Manifesto of 2012, stating:

“... In the fast-changing European context, we the regions are vitally important. Whatever our name or precise responsibilities, regions act as bridges between national ambitions and local delivery. We are close enough to our citizens to hear what they say and see what they need. We have the capacity to mobilize local resources to protect and promote the rights of all our citizens, particularly those who are poor and vulnerable ...” (4).
Regions have significant political and administrative responsibilities in areas related to public health and well-being. The roles and functions of those in the WHO European Region, though they differ widely, are crucial to social, environmental, and economic development at all levels (municipal, regional, and national), supporting the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda (Box 2) (5).
Box 2. The influence of regions on health and development

*Whole-of-government approach (health integration)*
Subnational governments can develop and implement integrated strategies for health protection and promotion, as well as disease prevention, that are linked to population data and regional health status. Regions are well placed to take the lead in and facilitate cooperation on action towards sustainable health development.

*Intersectoral and multisectoral partnerships*
Regions are also well placed to take the lead in processes where various community organizations come together to collectively focus their expertise and resources on complex issues of importance to the community, such as health and well-being for all.

*Regulation*
Regions are often positioned to influence the development of subnational strategies for or action in social, economic, and environmental areas.

*Citizen engagement*
Being at a level, which is in close contact with the citizens, regions are aware of their concerns and priorities. Regions have unique opportunities to partner with private and non-profit sectors, civil society, and citizen groups. Processes enabling everyday people to take part in developing, administering, and amending local plans and policies give them a sense of empowerment.

*Equity focus*
Subnational governments can mobilize and deploy local resources to create more opportunities for poor and vulnerable population groups, as well as to protect and promote the rights of all residents.

*Population data*
As actors in the areas of health, regions have the capacity to build robust databases around population health. The data collected need to be shared with partners and stakeholders to facilitate investment for health and sustainable development.

Source: Adapted from *Implementation framework for Phase VII (2019-2024) of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. Final (6).*
Goal of the roadmap

Using existing network opportunities to make real progress in improving health and well-being and reducing inequities, the RHN roadmap 2023–2026 seeks to support RHN member regions in developing a forward-looking vision that in practice would place health and well-being high on key political agendas. The aim is to promote investment for health and well-being at the regional level by building an inspiring platform whereby experiences in improving health and well-being and creating more resilient health systems can be shared.
RHN, as a growing platform, can bring subnational authorities across the WHO European Region together with the overall goal of:

- promoting better health and well-being at all ages, across all sectors and in all settings;
- securing universal access to quality care without financial hardship;
- protecting against health emergencies; and
- empowering health through science, data and innovation.

**Strategic objectives of RHN**

Based on 30 years’ experience, it is proposed that RHN’s strategic direction continue to:

- lead through example at the subnational level;
- support the implementation of WHO-policy priorities and the UN 2030 Agenda (5);
- act as a bridge between national commitments and regional and local delivery;
- collect, share and distribute data, evidence, intelligence and good practice; and
- leverage opportunities for regions to collaborate with each other at the regional, national and international levels.
Core themes

The RHN members have identified important priorities in line with their regional needs (7), the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda (5) and the EPW (3). These are, but not restricted to, the following (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Four goals and eleven thematic priorities

Protecting against health emergencies
- subnational programmes on emergency prevention, preparedness and response.

Empowering health: harnessing the power of science, data, and innovation
- health literacy;
- public health surveillance;
- digital health.

Promoting better health and well-being at all ages, across all sectors and in all settings
- planetary health, One Health, climate change and environment;
- social sustainability and stability;
- health in the well-being economy.

Securing universal access to quality care without financial hardship
- human resources for health;
- integrated, value-based and personalized long-term care;
- mental health care;
- cross-border public health.
Promoting health and well-being at all ages and across sectors

To this end, regions can invest in innovative public health practices, innovation, prevention, protection, and promotion. Regions can take responsibility and act in many ways, for example, regarding:

- **planetary health, One Health, climate change and environment**
  - anticipate, adapt, and mitigate climate change and environmental risk factors, implementing the One-Health approach;
  - address health threats at the animal, human and environment interface;
- **social sustainability and stability**
  - address social instabilities and the widening socioeconomic gaps;
health in the well-being economy

- develop the understanding that the economy and public investment and spending should be guided by the extent to which a policy, service or organization can improve health and well-being.

Securing universal access to quality care without financial hardship

As health-care providers or partners in health, regions can influence and invest in the resilience of health systems and their essential functions, including:

- human resources for health
  - ensure adequate investment for the availability, acceptability, coverage, and quality of the health workforce;
  - promote effective action to strengthen it;

- integrated, value-based and personalized long-term care
  - integrate primary health care in various settings, allowing unmet needs to be revealed and managed by assistive-care services;
  - integrate services (including health, social care, public health, and wider services) around the individual by setting up multidisciplinary teams to promote health and prevent disease;

- mental-health care
  - develop long-term mental-health care in the community and general health-care settings;
• invest in mental-health promotion and prevention initiatives in all community settings with the aim of building environments conducive to mental health, particularly in schools, workplaces and settings for older people;

- cross-border public health

• strengthen cross-border cooperation (including the mechanisms used to put it in place), identify key stakeholders, act on lessons learned (including challenges and enabling factors), and enhance collaboration among cross-border public health institutes and professionals.
Protecting against health emergencies

Regions are at the forefront of emergency prevention, preparedness and response. It will be important to develop or strengthen:

- subnational programmes on emergency prevention, preparedness and response
  - through a common, efficient, coordinated multisectoral approach, comprising all-hazard and hazard-specific measures at the community, regional, national and international levels.

Empowering health: harnessing the power of science, data, and innovation

Regions for health and their citizens rely on evidence-based information and knowledge. They are also well placed to develop and encourage initiatives that integrate financial, organizational, and technological resources. To benefit further from these advantages, it is suggested that three areas be strengthened:

- public health surveillance
  - ensure the availability of robust population data, as disaggregated as possible, for evidence-based policy development and the monitoring of interventions;

- digital health
  - promote digital literacy and harmonize regulatory frameworks;

- health literacy
  - build capacity and share knowledge in this area.
Collaboration

This will be achieved through the common understanding that strengths, such as collaborative working, open dialogue, transparency, information sharing, and diversity of experience, are among RHN’s key assets. Fig. 2 illustrates these strengths (8).

**Fig. 2. Strengths of RHN – the 6 Cs of collaboration**

**The 6Cs**

**Source:** WHO Regions for Health Network 26th annual meeting (8).
RHN will continue to strengthen its cooperative efforts in bringing about:

1. **joint advocacy and learning among RHN members**, for example, by holding annual RHN meetings; partnering with institutions that share RHN goals; strengthening possibilities for joint action by creating sub-Network task-force groups or partnerships, with a clear focus on tangible deliverables; and reporting on progress towards joint goals to strengthen the accountability and visibility of the Network and its members;

2. **innovation and solutions**, for example, by exchanging good practice and experience; creating or continuing “solutions-based working groups” in various fields; holding thematic seminars or workshops, bringing WHO experts, international experts and RHN members together; and co-organizing study visits or summer schools (hosted by the regions);

3. **resource sharing**, for example, through progress monitoring; active communication; awareness raising; pro-active promotion of the role of the regions within the Network; creation/use of opportunities for collaboration; and cooperation with WHO collaborating centres.
References


1 All references accessed 27 November 2023.


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WHO/EURO:2023-8996-48768-72565

World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe
UN City, Marmorvej 51
DK-2100, Copenhagen Ø, Denmark
Tel: +45 45 33 70 00
Fax: +45 45 33 70 01
Email: eurocontact@who.int
Website: www.who.int/europe