

Creating solutions for a better response: Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network Regional Partners Meeting for the Western Pacific, November 2024

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The first hybrid meeting of the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) partners from the World Health Organization's (WHO) Western Pacific Region was held on 20–21 November 2024 in Tokyo, Japan. Hosted by Japan's National Center for Global Health and Medicine (currently the Japan Institute for Health Security) and the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the meeting aimed to strengthen regional health security by advancing preparedness and responses to emerging public health threats.

The meeting built on GOARN's strategic theme that emphasizes creating solutions for better responses.¹ The meeting's objectives were to strengthen GOARN partner collaboration to prevent, prepare for, ensure readiness for and respond to public health emergencies; advance health security in the Region through the implementation of the Asia Pacific Health Security Action Framework² with the engagement of GOARN; and share opportunities for partners to increase their participation in the Network.

Altogether, 45 GOARN partners attended the meeting from 16 countries across four WHO regions (Table 1). Representatives from GOARN partner organizations moderated 2 days of technical sessions. The agenda is in Supplementary Table 1. Opening remarks by a representative from Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare emphasized Japan's commitment to strengthening regional health security and acknowledged GOARN's long-standing role in outbreak responses,

especially in the Western Pacific, home to approximately one quarter of GOARN's 320 partners.

The first session focused on the broader ecosystem that supports health security through the Asia Pacific Health Security Action Framework² and the development of interoperable national health emergency workforces aligned with the vision of the Global Health Emergency Corps.³ The GOARN Handbook⁴ was presented, illustrating the expansion of GOARN's role beyond outbreak response to include preparedness and readiness.

GOARN's role in strengthening the health emergency workforce was highlighted through discussion of its Capacity Strengthening and Training Programme,⁵ which includes a revised outbreak response simulation exercise and an updated online training platform. A representative from the Public Health Operations in Emergencies for National Strengthening in the Indo-Pacific programme (known as PHOENIX),⁶ funded by the Australian Government, described how their increased partner engagement has boosted participation in capacity-strengthening activities.

In 2024, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Japan's National Center for Global Health and Medicine and Germany's Robert Koch Institute jointly delivered GOARN's Orientation to International Outbreak Response, demonstrating GOARN partners' commitment to cross-border capacity-strengthening. A representative

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Table 1. List of participating institutions by country

Country	Institutions and organizations
Australia	Australasian College for Infection Prevention and Control
	Australian National University
	Global Health Division, Indo-Pacific Centre for Health Security, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
	National Centre for Immunization Research and Surveillance
	National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre
	Queensland Infection Prevention and Control Unit, Queensland Department of Health
	Sydney Infectious Diseases Institute and Westmead Hospital
	The Asia Pacific Consortium of Veterinary Epidemiology
	University of Newcastle
	University of Sydney
	University of Western Australia
Cambodia	WHO Representative Office for Cambodia
China	Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Fiji	The Pacific Community, Suva Regional Office
Germany	Centre for International Health Protection, Robert Koch Institute
India	Empower School of Health, Public Health Department
Japan	Association of Medical Doctors of Asia
	Graduate School of Medicine, Department of Virology, Tohoku University
	Graduate School of Medicine, Osaka Metropolitan University
	Hokkaido University
	Japan International Cooperation Agency
	Japanese Red Cross Wakayama Medical Center
	Mie National Hospital
	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
	Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare
	Nagasaki University
	Nara Medical University
	National Center for Global Health and Medicine
	National Institute of Infectious Diseases
	Saga University Hospital
	Saint Mary's Hospital
	Toshima Hospital
Mongolia	WHO Representative Office for Mongolia
Papua New Guinea	National Department of Health, Ministry of Health
Philippines	WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific
Republic of Korea	Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency
Singapore	Centre for Infectious Disease Emergency Response (CIDER), Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore
	National Centre for Infectious Diseases and Department of Infectious Diseases, Tan Tock Seng Hospital
Switzerland	WHO headquarters

Country	Institutions and organizations
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	International Severe Acute Respiratory and Emerging Infection Consortium
	MRC (Medical Research Council) Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis, Imperial College London
United States of America	Bureau for Global Health, US Agency for International Development
	East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, and Division of Emergency Operations, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
	University of Nebraska Medical Center

from the Robert Koch Institute also discussed its involvement in the GOARN Fellowship Programme. Discussions highlighted the need to enhance engagement through strategic groups,⁷ strengthen cross-regional collaboration and address fellowship access for Pacific island countries.

GOARN partners shared information about deployment experiences, including providing support to Mongolia during a measles outbreak and the Japan International Cooperation Agency's surge response to a cholera outbreak in Zambia.

Partners presented research on factors influencing the activation of rapid response teams in Papua New Guinea, with findings that could be used to inform strategies to improve future deployments. A separate partner collaboration emphasized the importance of gender-inclusive leadership by conducting research on women's leadership during health emergencies. Participants also discussed regional research priorities, including workforce development, rapid response team operations and community engagement.

Panellists discussed the urgency of building local resilience and cross-sector coordination to ensure effective emergency responses, especially in Pacific island countries where climate change has heightened community vulnerabilities. Key strategies that were considered included strengthening community preparedness, integrating health and disaster risk management, and enhancing collaboration among governments, nongovernmental organizations and local stakeholders.

In conclusion, GOARN's vital role in advancing regional health security was reaffirmed. Partners called

for regular communication from GOARN and among partners, shared leadership and regional strategic groups to ensure that activities are tailored to the local context and that they engage underrepresented partners. Key priorities included expanding the GOARN Capacity Strengthening and Training Programme⁵ and addressing deployment barriers, such as institutional, financial and administrative challenges. Mentorship and remote support during deployments were identified as effective ways to boost partners' involvement in outbreak responses. Partners also committed to advancing operational research and establishing a regional community of practice to enhance response methods and guide future strategies. Overall, the meeting confirmed GOARN partners' shared commitment to building a more resilient, collaborative and effective regional health emergency response system.

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Conflicts of interest

SS is an associate editor of the *Western Pacific Surveillance and Response* journal. She had no role in the editorial decision to publish this manuscript. The other authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Ethics statement

Formal ethical approval was not sought as research was not undertaken.

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