

Topic Overview

Strengthening National Health Systems' Capacity to Respond to Future Global Pandemics

Stakeholder Dialogue 4 November 2013

The McMaster Health Forum convened a stakeholder dialogue on the subject of strengthening national health systems' capacity to respond to future global pandemics. With the support of the Global Health Research Initiative (GHRI), a research funding partnership composed of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Canadian International Development Agency, and Canada's International Development Research Centre, the dialogue brought together 16 participants – four policymakers, two public health managers, three health system managers and professionals, one civil society leader and six researchers – from across North America to examine the problem, elements of a comprehensive approach for addressing it, and key implementation considerations.

Deliberation about the problem

The deliberation about the problem focused on five sets of challenges to strengthening national health systems' capacity to respond to future global pandemics: 1) the difficulty of making accurate assumptions about future global pandemics; 2) the lack (or complete reach) of a favorable “cultural climate” to respond to future global pandemics; 3) the lack of a systems approach to deal proactively with the root causes of pandemics; 4) the lack of innovation in research, especially during a pandemic or a crisis; and 5) the lack of resources to address future global pandemics. Dialogue participants held different views about the most meaningful way to frame the dialogue: strengthening capacity domestically and/or internationally.



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The views expressed in the issue brief and dialogue summary are the views of the authors and should not be taken to represent the views of the funders.





Participants drawn from government and from health, professional and research organizations gather during a McMaster Health Forum event on 4 November 2013

Deliberation about an approach

Dialogue participants generally supported three potential elements of a comprehensive approach to address the problem. They focused primarily on enhancing national health systems' surveillance capacity (element 1) and strengthening capacity to respond to the variability of pandemics (element 2), and to a lesser extent on strengthening the global pandemic governance system (element 3).

Participants identified several areas in which significant progress has been made or is currently being made: 1) in enhancing surveillance capacity (e.g., developing strong surveillance systems; sharing data collection, analysis and assessment; and providing dedicated funding for key public-health functions); 2) in strengthening capacity to respond to the variability of pandemics (e.g., building relationships and trust through collaborative initiatives; developing adaptive decision-making structures and processes; and developing health risk-communication strategies); and 3) in strengthening the global pandemic governance system (e.g., strengthening information sharing at the WHO and bilateral levels).

Participants also pointed out several areas for which there is a need to make greater progress, such as establishing collaborative interdisciplinary teams that can address human, animal and environmental health, better capturing the full potential of social media, and correcting failures of collaboration at the global level.

Deliberation about next steps

When the focus of deliberation turned to next steps for different constituencies, several dialogue participants articulated a sense of urgency to strengthen national health systems' capacity to respond to future global pandemics, and the need to pro-actively pursue particular courses of actions. Many dialogue participants committed to supporting the development of linkages across disciplines, sectors and jurisdictions, connecting and networking Canadian groups to current international efforts, and taking stock of the lessons learned 10 years after the SARS crisis and examining these lessons based on today's knowledge and experience. Dialogue participants also identified concrete steps that they could take depending on the nature of their organizations and/or roles, such as: mobilizing other forums to raise the prominence of the issue; increasing collaboration between funding agencies in Canada and internationally to support the capacity to conduct innovative research during a pandemic or a crisis; and designing an asset map of Canada's capacities to identify where we are, what's working (and not) and what the best use of resources could be.

Dialogue deliverables

To learn more about this topic, consult the [issue brief](#) that was presented to participants before the dialogue, the [summary](#) of the dialogue, and [view](#) or [listen](#) to the [interviews](#) with dialogue participants. For an electronic copy of the issue brief or dialogue summary, or to view or listen to the interviews, visit our website www.mcmasterhealthforum.com and click on 'Products' along the sidebar, or for direct access to our YouTube and iTunes U channels, simply click on the icons below.



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