



**Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation**

2022/SOM1/HWG-LSIF/SUM

Summary Report - Health Working Group and Life Sciences Innovation Forum Joint Meeting 2022



**Health Working Group and Life Sciences
Innovation Forum Joint Meeting
15 February 2022**

SUMMARY

On 15 February 2022, the APEC Health Working Group (HWG) convened its Joint Virtual Meeting with the Life Science Innovation Forum (LSIF). Thailand, represented by Dr. Pongsadhorn Pokpermdée (Thailand), HWG Chair and Dr. Michelle McConnell (United States), LSIF Planning Group Chair, co-chaired the meeting, together with Mr. Michael Pearson (Canada), HWG Vice Chair. Participants from 20 member economies, including Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Peru; the Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russia; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; the United States; and Viet Nam joined the meeting.

The main objective of the meeting was to address clarification questions made by member economies on activities under LSIF, discuss the alignment of the activities of LSIF with HWG, and how such activities may continue through sub-working groups of HWG. Several ongoing activities under LSIF were presented including Vaccines Task Force, Cervical Cancer, Cancer Control Policy, Health Financing, Exploring Health Technologies in Restoring Cross-Border Travel, Rare Disease Network, Regulatory Harmonization Steering Committee (RHSC), Peking University APEC Health Sciences Academy (HeSay), and APEC Harmonization Center (AHC).

1. Opening: Welcome and Introductory Remarks

1.1. Office of the HWG Chair and Vice Chair

HWG Chair, Dr. Pongsadhorn Pokpermdée provided introductory remarks by welcoming all member economies to the meeting. The Chair shared his appreciation towards the HWG Vice Chair, Mr. Michael Pearson and his team for the smooth transition towards his Chairmanship and the APEC Secretariat for their efforts in planning the meeting. Dr. Pongsadhorn stated that the objective of the meeting was to discuss and reach consensus on the possibility of including relevant activities currently under LSIF before its sunset on 31 March 2022. He encouraged active discussion from all member economies in achieving the APEC's mandate of improving health and wellbeing with the aim of promoting trade, security, growth, and development in the APEC region. Mr. Michael Pearson also welcomed the member economies to the meeting.

1.2. Office of the LSIF Planning Group Chair

Dr. Michelle McConnell noted that this meeting will address comments from member economies on the LSIF activities and discuss its future direction. She addressed the ongoing activities have supported many of the Leaders' Statements for a strong and sustainable healthcare system, equitable access to safe and affordable COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics and reducing health related barriers among female workers and vulnerable population. She highlighted the work in cervical cancer prevention, diagnosis, and treatment and innovative health financing as examples that have previously supported these Statements. She emphasised the cross-sectoral linkages of COVID-19 and the critical role of RHSC in early access of safe and effective COVID-19 interventions for safe reopening of borders. She closed her remarks by echoing the need to find value and alignment of LSIF activities with HWG and flexible structures in which they could continue.

1.3. APEC 2022 Thailand Priorities

Mr. Pruthipong Poonthrigobol, APEC SOM Chair's Assistant and Director of International Economic Policy Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, stated the theme of APEC 2022 to be – "Open. Connect. Balance.". He highlighted the need to revisit Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP) for a new generation of open trade in the region. With estimated \$1.2 trillion loss in revenue due to COVID-19, he referred to the taskforce responsible for facilitating safe and seamless cross-border travel by creating an information portal and

sharing public key infrastructure. To balance the region in all aspects, he proposed adopting the bio-circular-green (BCG) economy model as Standalone Leaders' Document. The BCG model would leverage on the use of STI (Science, Technology, and Innovation), whole society approach, and continued efforts on climate change as part of SDG goals. He stated that the proposed theme and activities under HWG and LSIF align with APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040. Finally, he outlined key dates in the APEC 2022 Notional calendar which included 5 SOM meetings, APEC Economic Leader's Week (AELW) between 14-19 November, and three important meetings relevant for APEC: ASEAN Summit, G-20 Summit, and APEC Summit.

2. Agenda and Project Update

2.1. Adoption of the Agenda

The HWG Chair and Ms. Aurora Tsai, Program Director, APEC Secretariat, confirmed a minor revision to the agenda by moving session 3 on Review the discussion at the previous meeting to session 12 on Discussion, meeting summary and next steps. The revised agenda was officially endorsed, and the Chair invited Ms. Aurora to provide project updates.

2.2. APEC Secretariat Project Update

Ms. Aurora stated that since the last project session (session 2) in 2021, 84 percent of submitted concept notes had been approved in-principle by the Budget Management Committee. This was the highest approval rate in APEC history, owing to the substantial funding contribution from the member economies of over \$12 million and active engagement. Second to EWG, HWG had the most concept notes funded in 2021. She informed the member economies that 10 March 2022 was the deadline for internal submissions of concept note for all APEC projects in session 1 in 2022. Due to lack of submission of qualified concept notes, the internal submission deadline (within HWG) of 17 February would be extended by a week and communicated to member economies via email. She announced the available funding for projects in 2022 to be more than \$11 million which may lead to higher approval rates.

The survey conducted in 2021 on LTEAP which was participated by 4,003 respondents showed improved results in terms of addressing priority issues, applied and sharing learning, and translating into policies and practices. She noted these indicators could be further improved, especially effective targeting of project participants, greater application of learnings, and increased participation. Based on the annual project data, Ms. Aurora highlighted the impact of COVID-19 resulting in fewer projects, lower budget spent, and 50% project completion. However, capacity building, domestic participation, publications were seen from 12 member economies.

3. Review the discussion at the previous joint meeting

Dr. Pongsadhorn reminded member economies that at the informal joint meeting between HWG and LSIF held on 26 January 2022, a consensus on the renewal of LSIF activities could not be reached. He advised that the Secretariat would facilitate any necessary discussion for LSIF activities that may be dissolved, merged, or transferred to HWG before LSIF' sunset after 31 March 2022. Such activities may involve academia and private sector, subject to endorsement.

4. Projects related to ICT

4.1. Exploring Health Technologies in Restoring Cross-Border Travel in APEC Post-COVID-19 by Ms. Patricia Wu, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

On behalf of the United States, Ms. Patricia Wu proposed innovative tools developed by the private sectors in the US that authenticates COVID-19 tests and vaccination certificates which aligns with APEC's current theme of open and connect as well as calls from APEC leaders and trade ministers for safe opening of borders. The project, co-sponsored by Thailand, will host policy dialogue between cross-sectoral stakeholders to discuss costs, benefits, and lessons on using such tools, and outputs will be used to improve these tools. The project will be self-funded and likely to extend to June 2022. Ms. Patricia will circulate the agenda and speakers list through the Secretariat to invite member economies to participate in this policy dialogue.

5. Workstreams related to cancer

5.1. Cervical Cancer by Dr. Ted Trimble, U.S. National Cancer Institute

Dr. Ted Trimble reminded that cervical cancer work was proposed and approved by both HWG and LSIF in 2013 due to rising burden of disease among women and its impact on the economy in the region. In collaboration with the National Cancer Center of China and the US National Cancer Institute, a Satellite Technical Workshop was developed during SOM3 in 2013 which eventually became the model for subsequent workshops. Dr. Ted highlighted that with participation from several member economies, APEC Cervical Cancer Roadmap for 2016-2021 was developed to promote sustainable economic development by women which was endorsed by HWG and LSIF. The Roadmap has been revised and endorsed, in light of WHO initiated proposal on global cervical cancer prevention for 2021-2025 in 2018 and accounting for the latest scientific discoveries. There would be several policy dialogues taking place between 2021-2022 to accelerate implementation of cancer control programs governed by economies and industries.

5.2. Cancer Control Policy by Dr. Ted Trimble, U.S. National Cancer Institute

Dr. Ted shared that each economy had established its national cancer control policy, therefore, this project aimed to create a platform to share best practices. He outlined several workshops took in 2021 with the aim of creating an Action Plan on Cancer Control Policy with actionable targets and corresponding indicators for individual member economies. Findings from this initiative could be translated into other cancer areas and used by other regions where APEC member economies operate in. Dr. Ted pointed that the project was jointly developed by multiple stakeholders, self-funded, and directly aligns with APEC's objectives of addressing NCDs. He hoped this project which was endorsed by LSIF in July 2021 would be continued under HWG.

China sought clarification on the sources of funding for this project. Dr. Ted clarified that the in-person technical workshops were primarily funded by governments while the educational seminars were jointly funded by academia and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

6. Health Financing and Investment Workstream

6.1. APEC Healthcare Financing Action Plan by Dr. Ryan MacFarlane, Life Sciences Innovation Forum Advisor

Dr. Ryan MacFarlane stated that the project was in recognition of health as an investment and means to find new and innovative financing mechanisms to close access gap. This endorsed initiative has been recognised by APEC leaders, including Health and Finance Ministers. He shared that over 500 participants attended the healthcare financing webinar series, and the APEC health financing roadmap was underway. As for next steps, he shared that the project would continue its webinar series with case studies and best practices and help interested economies to deploy these innovative financing mechanisms until 2023. He outlined the governing structure to be jointly led by governments, industry and academia and advanced by Asia-Pacific Financial Forum

under the Finance Ministers Process. He stated there are no budget implications for HWG and that sustainable health financing was also a priority in the HWG Strategic Plan 2021–2025 and the North Star 2030 strategic document.

7. Vaccines Workstream

7.1. APEC Action Plan on Vaccination Across the Life-Course by Ms. Ada Wong, Asia Public Affairs Lead, Sanofi

Ms. Ada Wong shared that the Vaccine Taskforce is a coalition between public and private sector with the aim of coordinating all activities relating to vaccination with special emphasis on COVID-19 given its impact on routine immunisation. She highlighted that the priority of this initiative was reflected by the participation of 20 out of 21 member economies. She informed that the Action Plan on Vaccination Across the Life-Course was endorsed by both LSIF and HWG in August 2021 and the aim of the taskforce was to help create a resilient and sustainable life-course immunisation programs in APEC member economies through 2030. She highlighted several events and webinars had taken place to push this goal. As for the plans in 2022 and beyond, Ms. Ada stated the Taskforce aims to help member economies implement the action plan and that a baseline regional research was ongoing to understand the status of the 7 pillars included in the action plan. A survey in this regard would be conducted and disseminated through the regional dashboard. She clarified the initiative was co-developed by governments and industry, was self-funded, and the roadmap work run through 2030. She pointed that both HWG Strategic Plan and the North Star have their aims of preventing and controlling infectious diseases, including immunisation.

China sought clarification on the sources of funding for this project. Ms. Ada clarified that the Taskforce is primarily funded by the industry.

8. Rare Diseases Workstream

8.1. APEC Action Plan on Rare Diseases by Prof. Matthew Bellgard, Chair of the APEC LSIF Rare Disease Network/ eResearch Director at Queensland University of Technology, Australia

Prof. Matthew Bellgard stated that around 200 million individuals are affected in the APEC region by 1 of 7,000 rare disease and that rare diseases highlights gaps and barriers within health systems which need addressing for a functioning and sustainable health systems. He emphasised that the Rare Disease Network (RDN) has been recognized as the "world's largest public-private partnership devoted exclusively to rare diseases." The Action Plan from this initiative has been presented in Europe and has opportunity to be used as the global model through the United Nations. Since its endorsement in 2018, the aim has been to implement the recommendations as per local needs and context and to assist economies in accelerating and harmonising rare disease policies and plans using the Action Plan as a guide, as well as highlighting best practices through regulatory review, health technical assistance and funding mechanisms. He shared the key activities included the following:

- Ongoing policy dialogue series in partnership with one or more member economies to co-host this dialogue to share best practices. These dialogues have been attended by high-level ministers and previously hosted by several member economies.
- Strategic partnership with Orphanet Journal of Rare Disease to increase visibility of authors and issues in APEC region and to provide avenues to increase the network.

- Measurement of the action plan implementation through for e.g., the survey evaluation which is one of the largest and broadest international evaluation in rare disease. The survey which is expected occur annually enables economies to identify areas of strength and identify priority areas and draft next steps.
- Rare disease stakeholder consultations that are structured interviews with individual member delegates before, during, and after drafting the action plans.

He also emphasised that Rare Disease activities are self-funded from variety of sources and developed by governments, academia, patients, caregivers, and industry. The Action Plan is expected to continue until 2025 with the hope of an extension to continually update the Action Plan. He highlighted HWG priorities, including noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) control, health systems strengthening, universal health coverage (UHC), mental health, childhood nutrition and digital health, to which this work could provide support.

9. Peking University APEC Health Sciences Academy (HeSAY)

9.1. Peking University APEC Health Sciences Academy (HeSAY) by Dr. Zheng Xiaoying, Dean, APEC Health Sciences Academy, Peking University, China

A representative from the Peking University APEC Health Sciences Academy (HeSAY) stated that HeSAY, established in 2015 upon approval from the Government of China, is committed to collaborating with APEC economies to reduce population health inequalities, achieve UHC, and overcome health barriers in the APEC region and globally. She explained that the three objectives of HeSAY were (1) establishing a high-end think tank that provides policy recommendations on health promotion, (2) conducting scientific research and education programs, and (3) creating a multidisciplinary, multi-sectoral, and multi-lateral platform that facilitates cross-border health innovation collaboration. Between 2014-2021, HeSAY accomplished numerous milestones including the Equal Access, Inclusive Development in APEC summit, workshops on mental health, establishing APEC Centers for Regulatory Science, innovation and policies in rare disease, 5th Anniversary Assessment Conference from HeSAY, advancing women in science, policies for disability prevention among others. She informed that all activities are self-funded, primarily from government and academic institutions. The objectives of establishing an international multicentre for population health research and development, formulating roadmap and initiatives in research projects on global health governance, and international health education platform would be realised through various ongoing activities through to 2030. She highlighted the goals and actions of HeSAY of establishing high-end think tank, promoting, and building scientific research capacity, and collaboration with APEC region and globally, were aligned with the objectives of HWG.

10. APEC Harmonization Center (AHC)

10.1. APEC Harmonization Center (AHC) by Dr. Youngju Choi, National Institute of Food and Drug Safety Evaluation (NIFDS), Korea

Dr. Youngju Choi informed that AHC, established in 2009 with support from the Government of the Republic of Korea, is a specialised centre dedicated to harmonising and reducing unnecessary regulations in the APEC region. She shared that AHC's aims were to facilitate regulatory convergence, enhance quality, safety and efficacy of medical products, foster collaboration and information sharing among Asia-Pacific members, and promote access to best practices. Notable achievements by AHC included 54 workshops attended by 12,057 participants and 392 trainees, AHC e-learning Centre utilised by 21 APEC economies, and numerous Drug Approval System Reports. As for plans for 2022 and beyond, AHC would continue to build regulatory technical capacity, strengthen regulatory collaboration, and identify gaps and opportunities for innovative approaches. With the COVID-19 pandemic, limited resources, and the need to protect public health, Dr Youngju also highlighted

the growing importance of regulatory convergence to access to high quality medicine and reduce regulatory burden. She stated that AHC would continue to be the only specialised APEC centre for regulatory convergence with strong commitment from the Government of the Republic of Korea and to create a network across APEC member economies. She informed that AHC activities are self-funded and developed in consultation with its Advisory Board. Given that AHC is a specialised APEC centre, there is no fixed term for its activities.

11. APEC Regulatory Harmonization Steering Committee

11.1. APEC Regulatory Harmonization Steering Committee by Dr. Nobumasa Nakashima, RHSC Co-Chair (Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Agency, Japan) and Dr. Michelle Limoli, RHSC Co-Chair (Food & Drug Administration, United States)

Dr. Nobumasa Nakashima informed that two Co-Chairs and Vice Chair of RHSC as well as leads of 7 priority working areas of RHSC must be regulators. The RHSC activities are supported by regulated industry and academia from scientific and technical point of view only. He stated that RHSC activities are self-funded. The Visions 2030 & Strategic Framework was endorsed by LSIF in 2021, and the roadmap would continue to 2030. Dr. Nobumasa stated that RHSC contributes to early and stable access to safe and effective medical products in the APEC region, hence, the RHSC activities are relevant to HWG, especially in light of COVID-19. As for 2022 and beyond, he stated RHSC aims to facilitate regulatory cooperation among medical product regulatory authorities, build human capacity in regulatory science among medical product regulatory science, and promote political will for convergence and reliance among regulatory policymakers. He highlighted that RHSC has accomplished numerous achievements and hope it can continue to make impact.

Japan commented that RHSC work is directly aligned with the objectives of HWG and find it appropriate in its continuation and suggested to be incorporated within HWG activities moving forward.

12. Discussion, Meeting Summary and Next Steps

12.1. Discussion on the Alignment of the activities of LSIF with HWG

The Chair invited the HWG Vice Chair to lead the discussion. The Vice Chair expressed appreciation to all presentations and discussion in the meeting. He emphasised that all activities and workstreams were aligned with the HWG's current work and objectives of promoting health through multistakeholder collaboration, especially in light of COVID-19. He suggested amalgamation and integration of LSIF workstreams and activities into existing HWG activities. He also highlighted the opportunity to use past experiences that could be built on as best practices for subsequent work and to link health objectives with other sectors. He also stated that, as advised by the APEC Project Management Unit, all approved LSIF projects would continue to their finalisation regardless of their funding sources or governance decisions moving forward. The Vice Chair then invited comments from member economies.

China expressed gratitude to the HWG Chair and Vice Chair, the LSIF Planning Group Chair, and LSIF colleagues for providing additional information about LSIF projects and workstreams. China proposed the following action points:

1. The Cervical Cancer workstream and the Cancer Control Policy workstream are to be synergised and combined into one activity given the overlap and similarity in their objectives.
2. The Health Financing workstream should be terminated as it is unable to establish decision-making body and participants, and because it is jointly advanced by the Asia-Pacific Financial Forum under the Finance Ministers process.

3. Given that APEC should focus be on areas affecting major populations with high burden of disease such as NCD, communicable disease, maternal and child health, together with limited time and resources, Rare Disease should be incorporated into the HWG as a project rather than as a workstream.
4. Both AHC and RHSC should be incorporated into the Sub-Committee on Standards and Conformance (SCSC), given their alignment with the Terms of Reference (ToR) of SCSC, not with HWG.

Japan commented that RHSC activities and AHC are aligned with the ToR of HWG as RHSC contributes to early access and supply of safe and effective medical products in the APEC region.

Republic of Korea (AHC) commented that AHC is a specialised APEC centre with 28 different centres operating across the APEC region that operates in a similar manner to RHSC. AHC highlighted that there is no existing procedure to carry operations and that transferring of work would affect all operating APEC centres.

The Vice Chair requested that comments made during the discussion are to be shared in a written format after the meeting for clarity and further consideration. He explained that discussion around continuation of LSIF activities under HWG would continue before reaching consensus on flexible alternatives from member economies.

13. Closing Remarks

Mr. Michael thanked Dr. Pongsadhorn, for leading the meeting and steering the discussions and Dr. Michelle, for organising and facilitating the presentations on behalf of the LSIF colleagues.

Ms. Aurora requested China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (AHC) to submit their written comments raised during the meeting regarding the LSIF activities via email to the Secretariat. She informed that the draft version of the HWG's work plan for 2022 is being prepared.

Dr. Michelle thanked all the members for the meeting and achievements through the activities. She highlighted that all proposed activities align with HWG and APEC Leaders' statements and the opportunity to maximise efficiency and results across all sub fora.

Dr. Pongsadhorn expressed his gratitude to all the presenters and all member economies for their active discussions and interventions. He shared his anticipation for similar fruitful and productive discussion in the upcoming HWG meeting to be held on 16-17 February 2022.

.....