

WHO (SEARO) Regional Conference on Public Health in South-East Asia in the 21st Century

Background, Objectives, and Expected Outcome

Background

Rapid advances in health sciences, changing epidemiological and demographic profiles, consequences of globalization and market mechanisms, changing economic scenarios, and increasing movement of people have presented new opportunities, as well as formidable challenges, to Public Health. Faced with the perception that the Public Health systems in countries of the South-East Asia Region might be falling into disarray, there was need to take a close look at these systems. The concern focused on quality of the Schools of Public Health, professional capacities, societal commitment, and the realization of National Public Health goals.

The **Regional Conference on Public Health in South East Asia in the 21st Century** was organized by the **World Health Organization (WHO)** from 22nd to 24th November, 1999 at Calcutta. The objective of the conference was to advocate the importance of Public Health for health and socio-economic development and to promote newer concepts and strategies in Public Health practice and education.

Participants included senior officers of the Health Ministries from the various countries of the region, directors of Public Health services, heads of national health programs, deans and senior faculty from various Schools of Public Health and other leading training institutions, and leaders of NGOs active in Public Health. Representatives of UN agencies and bilateral organizations also participated in the Conference. Leading Public Health experts from UK, USA, and Australia, and from WHO Headquarters at Geneva and its South East Asia Regional Office at New Delhi facilitated the discussions. Thus, the initiative successfully brought together leaders in Public Health education, research and services, and senior officers from bilateral and multi-lateral agencies to discuss issues and concerns in Public Health in South-East Asia, and to identify key strategies and directions for strengthening Public Health.

Considering that Calcutta was the home of the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, one of the oldest institutions of Public Health in India and in the region, it was proposed to hold the Conference in partnership with the Institute at Calcutta.

Objectives

Overall Objective: The overall objective of the Conference was to advocate the importance of Public Health for health and socio-economic development and to promote newer concepts and strategies in Public Health practice and education.

Specific Objectives:

- (1) To review the current status and emerging trends of Public Health in the South-East Asia Region, particularly relating to the national policies and practice.
- (2) To identify political, biomedical, social, economic and behavioral determinants and the major challenges and opportunities for strengthening Public Health practice in the next millennium.
- (3) To develop a consensus on strategies and approaches to address these challenges and to further strengthen national capacities for improving Public Health in the region.

Expected Outcomes

- (1) Awareness created among key health personnel and policy-makers regarding the critical role of Public Health in national development.
- (2) Strategies developed to promote partnerships and further strengthen Public Health policy and practice in the countries of South-East Asia Region.