New Zealand

Ministry of Health comments on the Draft Global Plan of Action to Strengthen the Role of the Health System to address Interpersonal Violence against Women and Girls

The Ministry welcomes the invitation to member states to comment on WHO’s proposed Global Plan in response to the World Health Assembly Resolution 67.15 (May 2014) on *Strengthening the role of the health system in addressing violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children*.

We endorse the scope, vision, goal and objectives outlined in sections 1 and 2 of the Global Plan and the stronger alignment with relevant goals and targets for the Sustainable Development Goals and post-2015 agenda outlined in Annex 6, (p13).

The Global Plan intends to enhance, rather than duplicate existing programmes that address violence. Guidance and tools will be welcomed that will add value to health’s role in the implementation of our national cross-agency family violence/sexual violence programme (launched July 2015) and Children’s Action Plan (a cross-agency programme to coordinate services and improve outcomes for vulnerable children and their families). Actions outlined in the Global Plan to improve the capacity and capability of the health workforce are consistent with priority actions in these cross-agency programmes.

New Zealand’s Violence Intervention Programme (VIP) has focussed on developing health service infrastructures to support health professionals to screen and refer victims of partner abuse and sexual violence and to identify, assess and refer children who have been abused and neglected as part of routine healthcare practice in designated services since 2007. There are ongoing challenges in establishing coordinated and integrated programmes in designated health services that are nationally consistent and effective, and also contributing effectively to new cross-agency programmes, (p15). The recognition that implementation of the Global Plan will take time is consistent with our experience.

We would like to request the WHO secretariat provide technical support and tools to member countries to assist assessment of the economic impacts of violence to the health sector to support the Global Plan, (Indicator 18, p23). This would contribute to SD1 aims to strengthen health system leadership and governance in addressing violence (p15).
WHO data indicates that member countries are at various stages in implementation of health system responses to violence. It would helpful if the Global Plan can promote the notion of focussing on quality and graduated expectations for implementation and reporting so that member countries can participate and report appropriately for their stage of readiness, (p6, 29).

We would support tools developed through the Global Plan being able to be integrated with quality improvement and risk monitoring and management programmes in health, e.g. for maternal and child health. (A graduated monitoring plan is promoted through WHO’s global Mental Health plan to good effect). New Zealand uses the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) model to support establishment of our VIP programmes.

We would encourage the WHO secretariat to develop standardised tools to measure health system improvements over time (including tools to examine the quality and consistency of health service responses within countries – particularly related to sexual assault and trauma care as these are known to be variable). In New Zealand we also have programmes focussed on health services for prisoners and children in state care who are victims of abuse, often with complex health needs as a result of violence and neglect. New Zealand is particularly committed to building the capacity of health workers to be culturally responsive members of trans disciplinary teams.

In summary, prioritisation in the Global Plan of health contributions to multi-sectoral responses, strengthening health services, the health workforce, and programmes and research to improve system responsiveness (such as health information systems, monitoring and evaluation), supports the work of the New Zealand health sector to address interpersonal violence (p28).