

Public health governance – Global perspective and a framework underpinning the Essential Public Health Functions

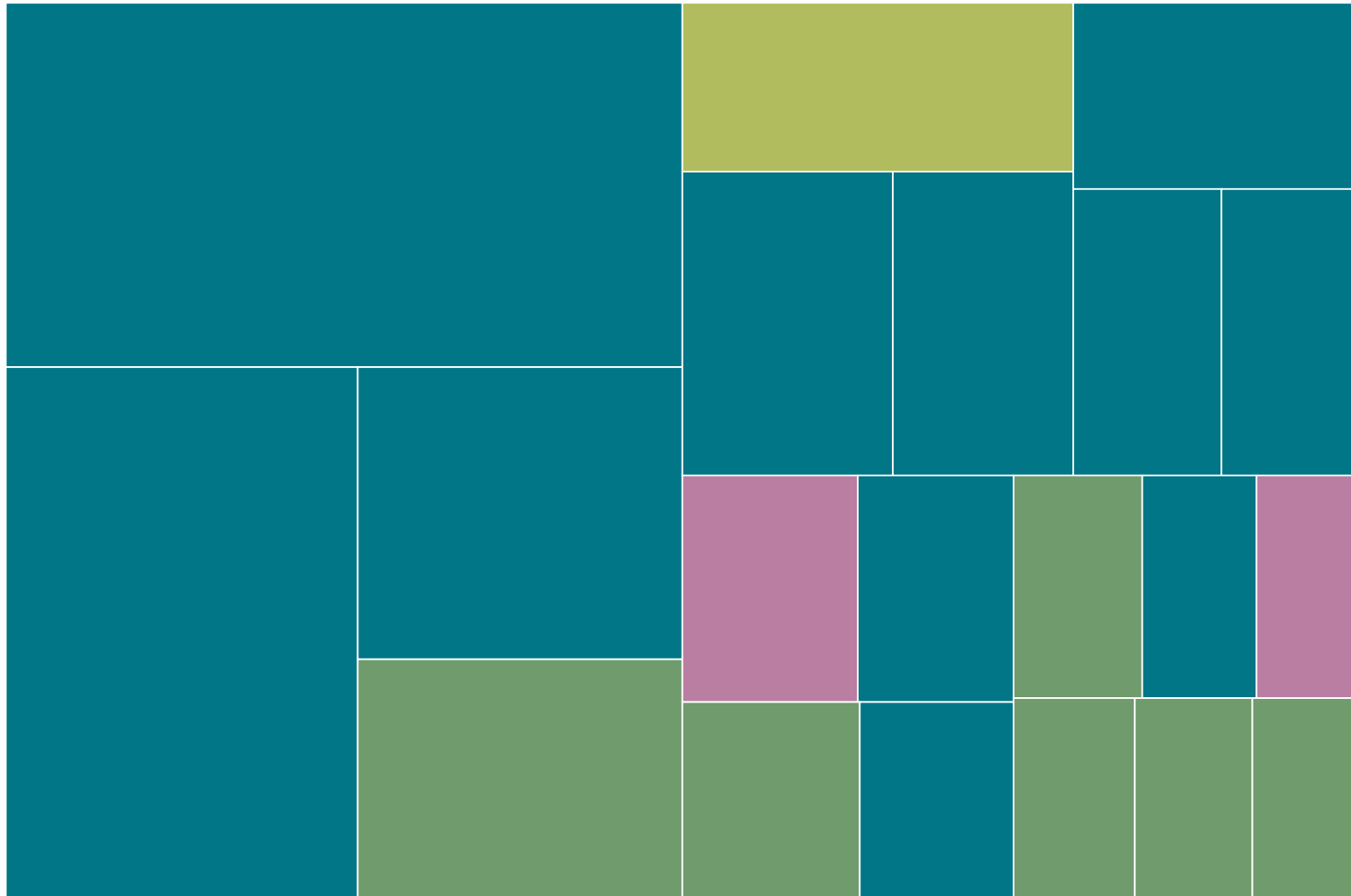
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Complex stressors & demands on the health system



Global leading causes of deaths (2023)

Top 20 leading level-3 causes of global deaths (2023)



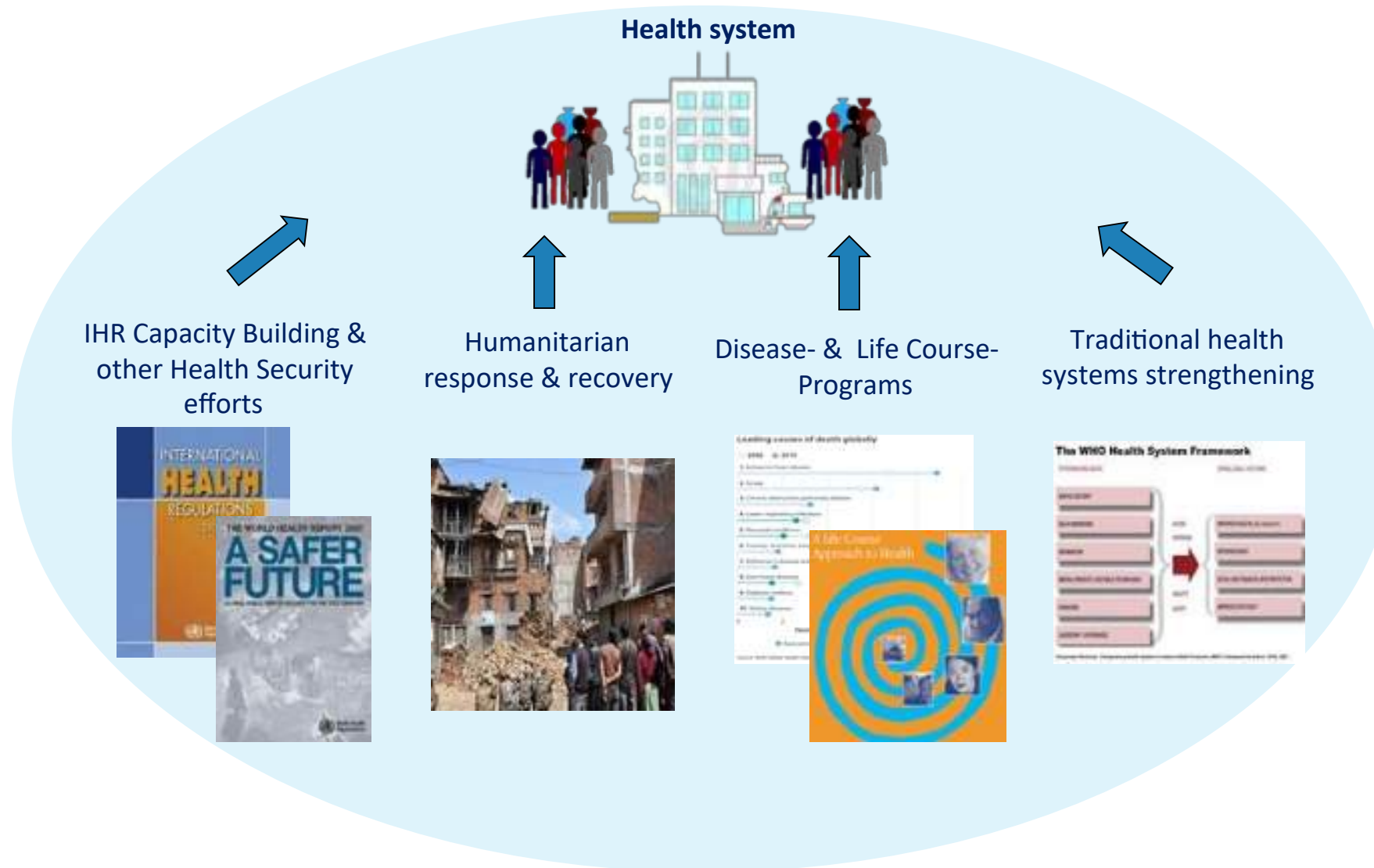
Note:

At the most detailed level, 292 fatal causes are estimated in the Global Burden of Disease Study 2023.

Legend:

Noncommunicable disease
Communicable disease
Injuries
Maternal, neonatal, and nutritional diseases

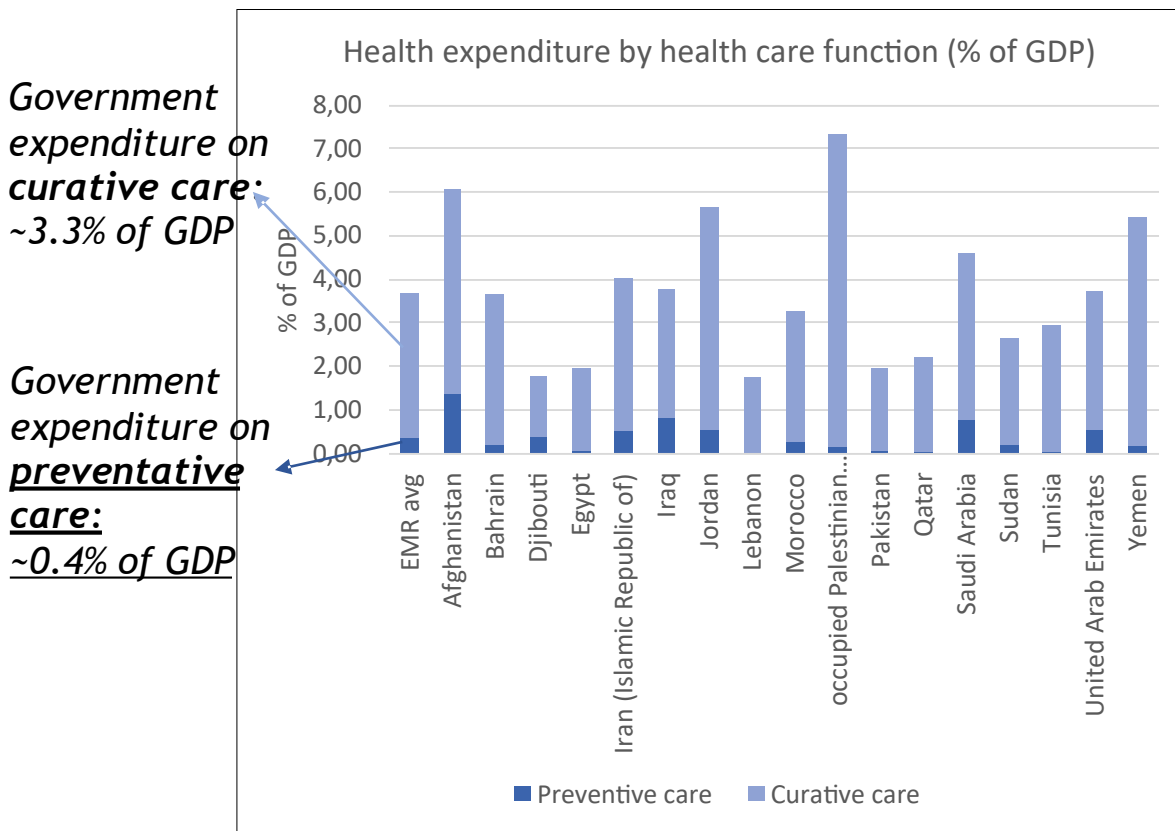
Siloed efforts in strengthening health system, including public health governance



- Prevailing **gaps in applying an integrated approach to strengthening health system and intersectoral efforts to health** in policy making, planning, resources allocation, service delivery, M&E, etc.
- This also created siloed public health governance structures and stewardship in countries.
- Public health **skewed to emergency management**; lack of proportionate investment in promotion, prevention and protection

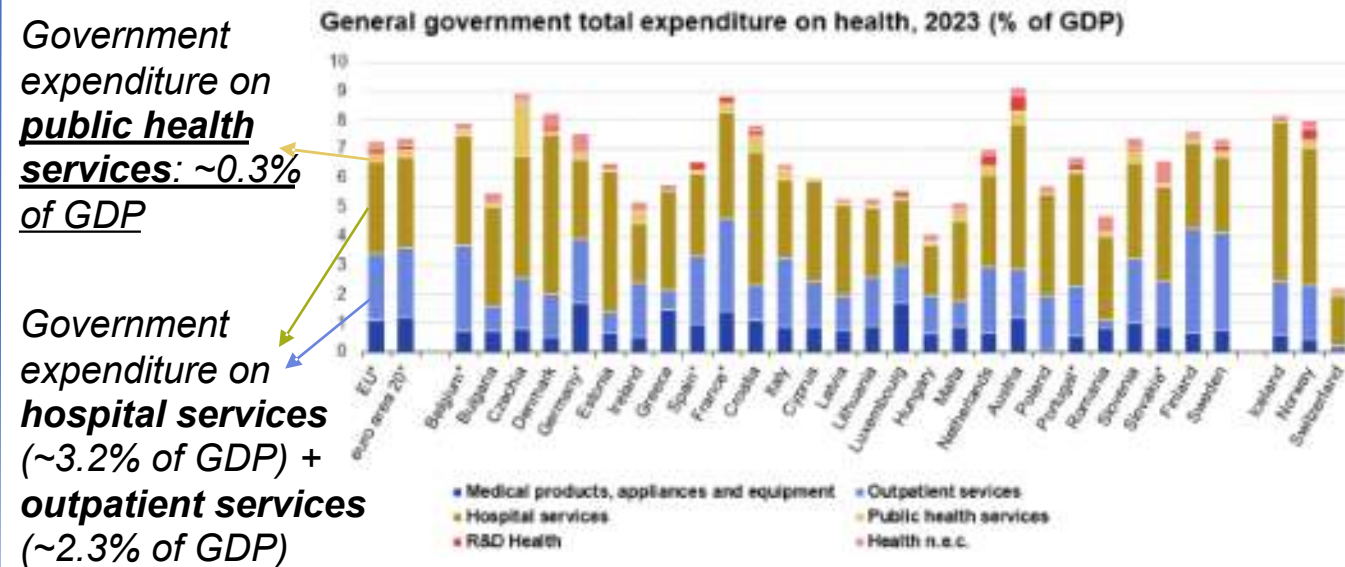
Chronic under-investment / under-prioritization of public health services

Example: a snapshot of government expenditure on health in WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region countries



Source: <https://apps.who.int/nha/database/ViewData/Indicators/en>

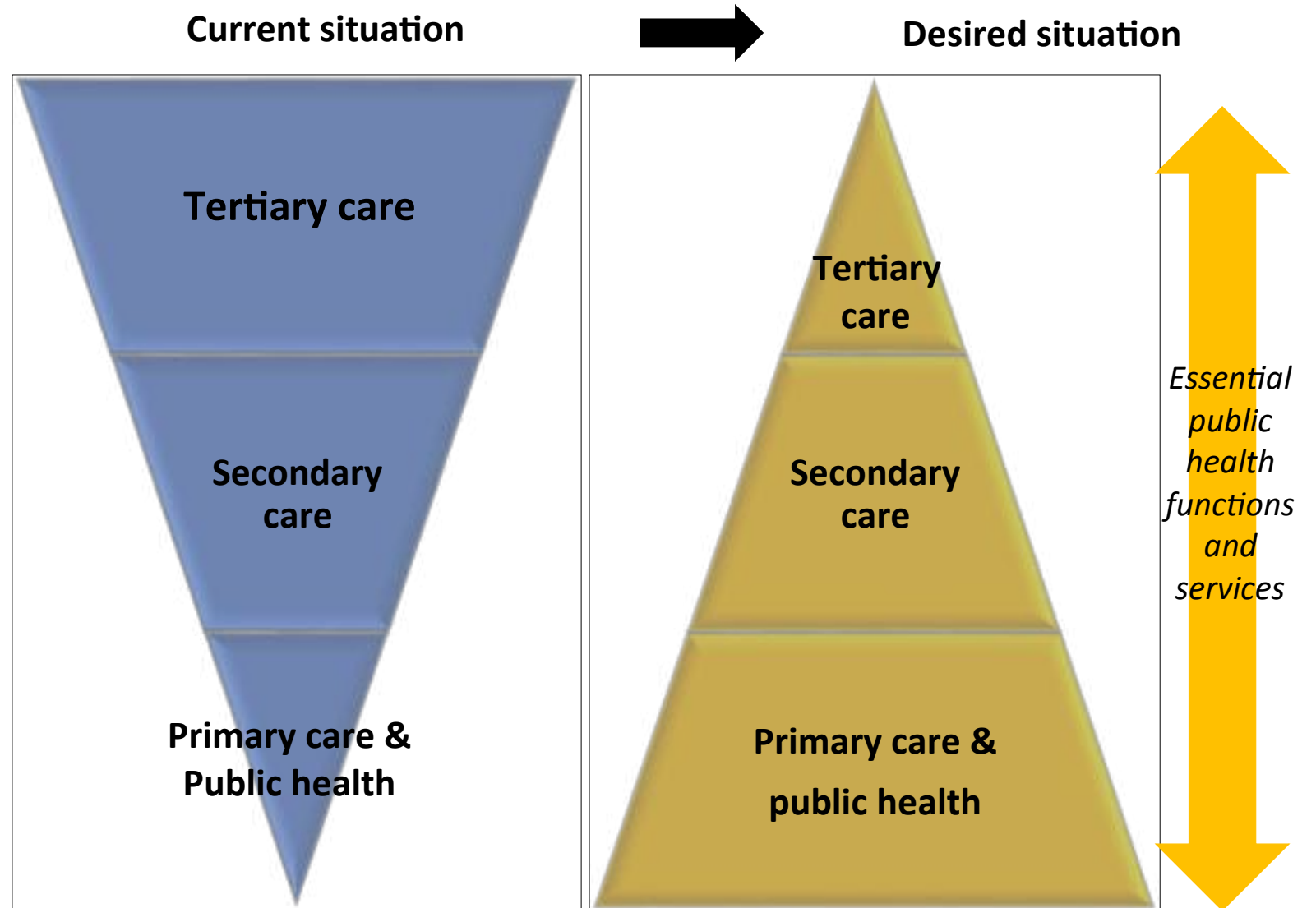
Example: a snapshot of government expenditure on health in EU countries



Source: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Government_expenditure_on_health

Urgent need to integrate public health in health system

- Shifting emphasis and mindset from curative-oriented to prevention- and promotion-based, by strengthening primary care and integrating public health in health system
- “Primary health care can meet 90% of a person’s health needs throughout their lifetime” -WHO
<https://www.who.int/activities/moving-towards-phc>



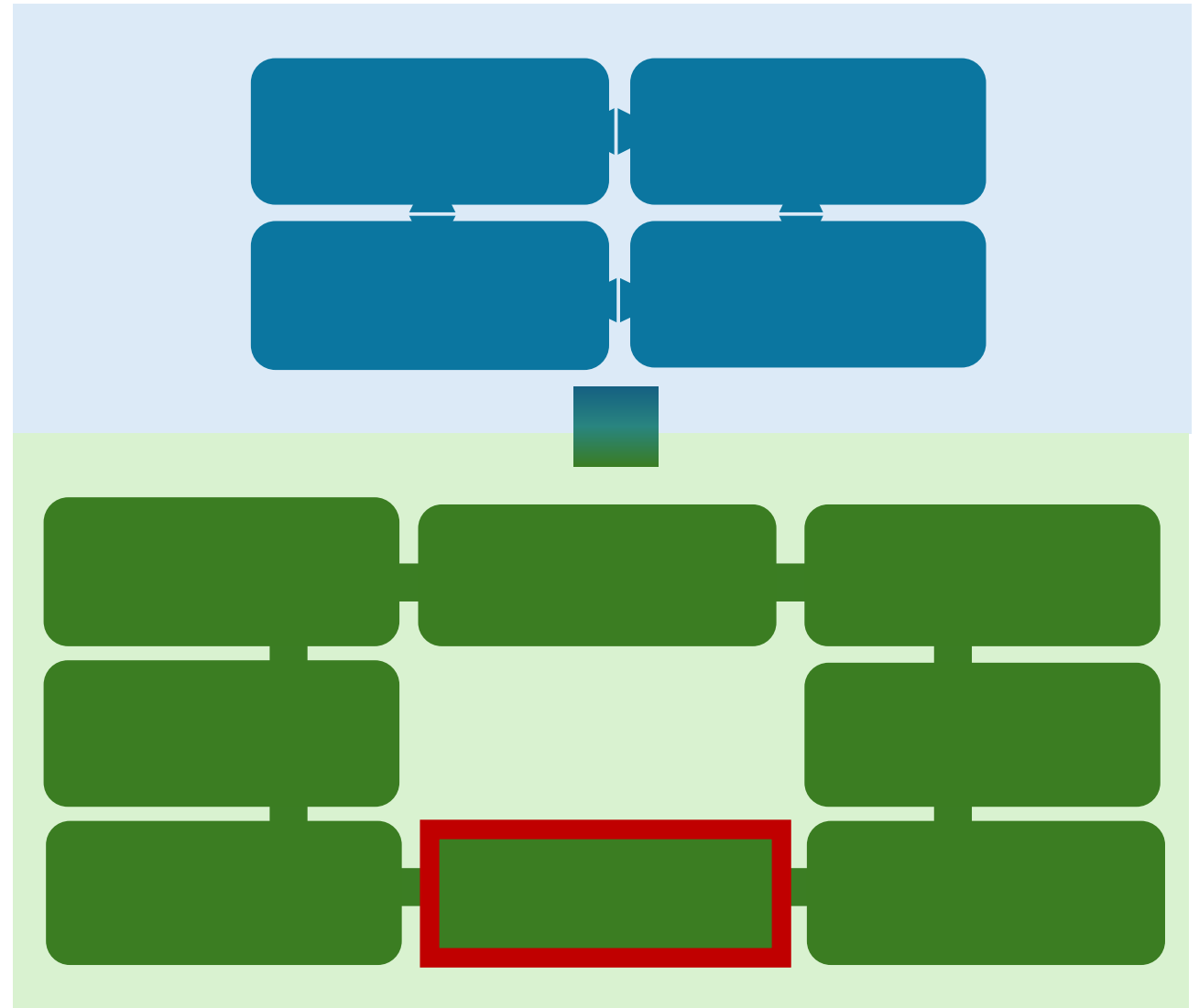
Strengthening public health governance to underpin the EPHF approach

Rationale

- Robust, multi-faceted and effective **public health governance is considered a key enabler** of broader activities to Promote, Provide and Protect public health.
- It remains **challenging to define and characterize public health governance** – also given pre-existing siloed objectives.
- **EPHFs are not comprehensively implemented** in countries - need for stronger public health governance.
- **Lack of guidance** to enhance public health governance.

Ref: Towards applying the essential public health functions for building health systems resilience: a renewed list and key enablers for operationalization. *Frontiers in Public Health*. 2022. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.1107192>

Essential Public Health Function (EPHF) approach

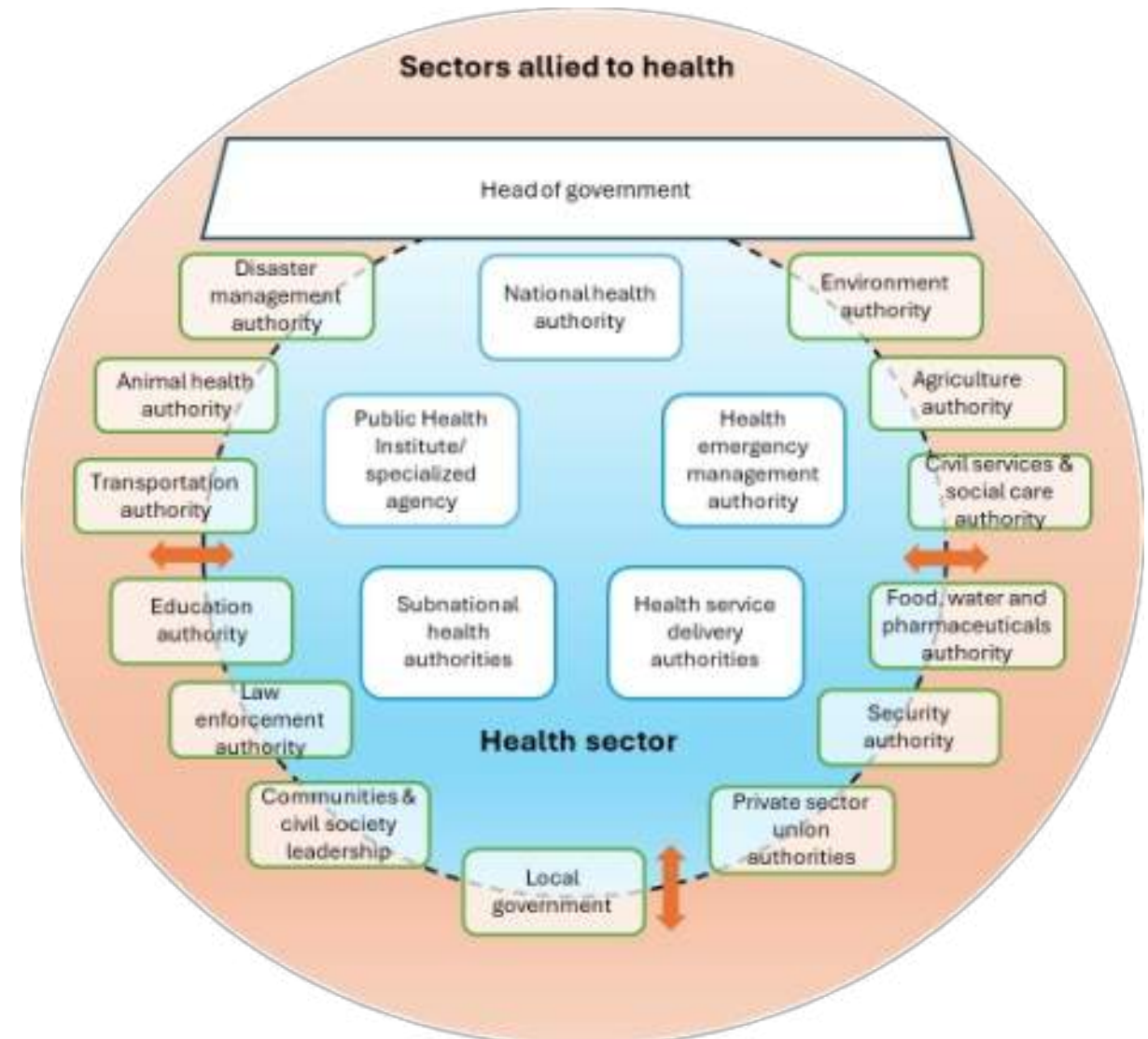


Public health governance: concept and requirements

Operational definition of governance for public health

Governance for public health refers to the **processes, structures and mechanisms** for decision-making and oversight to **guide, coordinate and ensure accountability** regarding the **collective efforts** of all stakeholders in the **delivery** of all essential public health functions and services within a designated context. It involves clear authority with **agreed mandates, resource stewardship**, operational and scientific independence, and collaborative arrangements across all levels within and beyond the health sector.

Ref: Governance for public health across the health and allied sectors: A report to guide country-level institutional capacity for essential public health functions underpinning multisectoral approaches. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2025. <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/383132>



Examples of typical country-level stakeholders that should be involved in public health governance across health and allied sectors

Challenges in public health governance globally

No unified approach / structures of public health governance to oversee and coordinate public health

Limited mandate of public health authorities to ensure the coordination

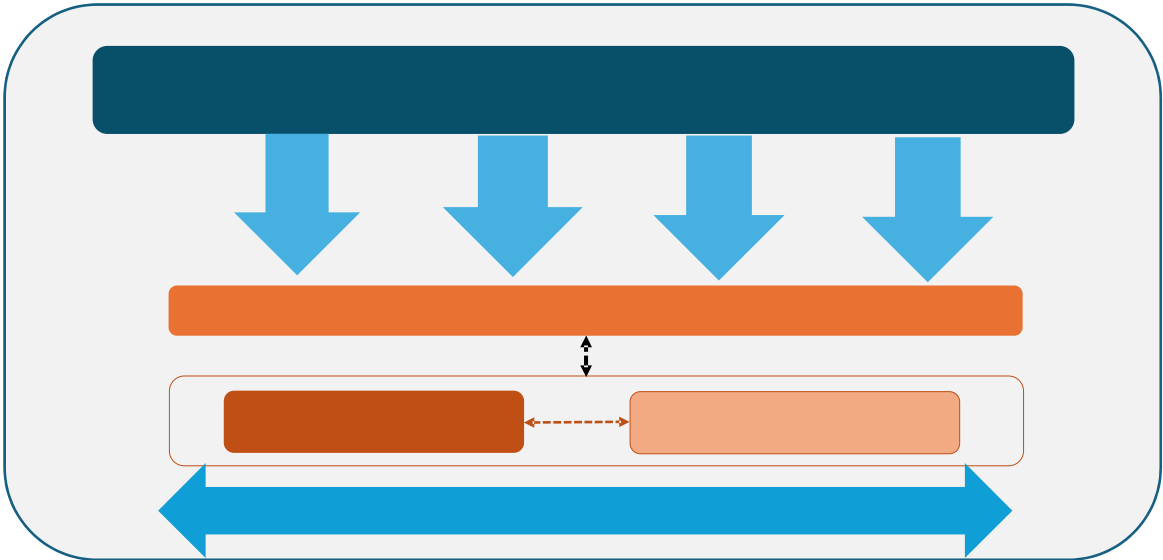
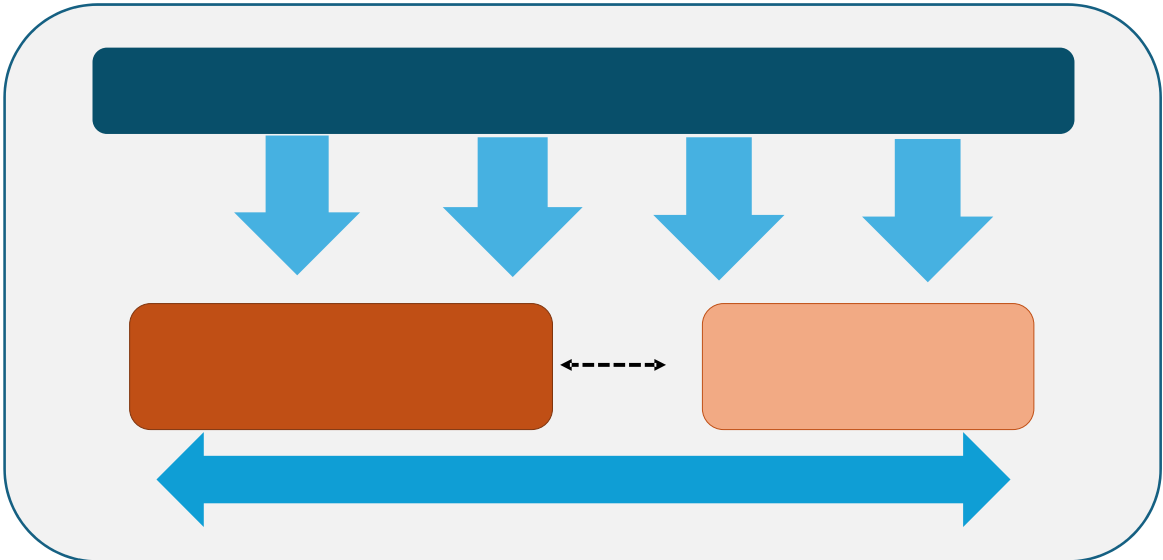
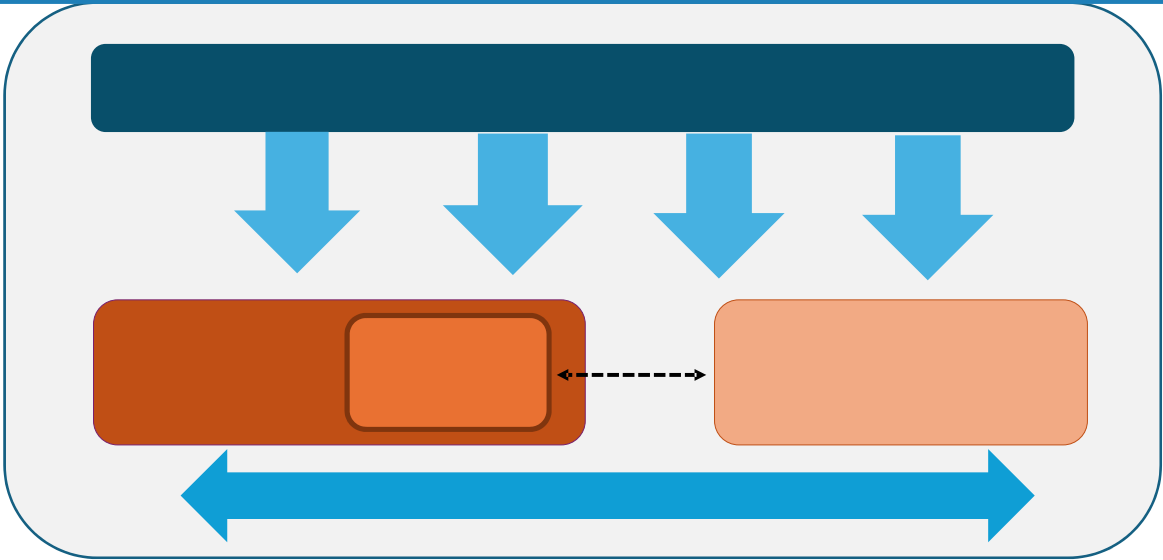
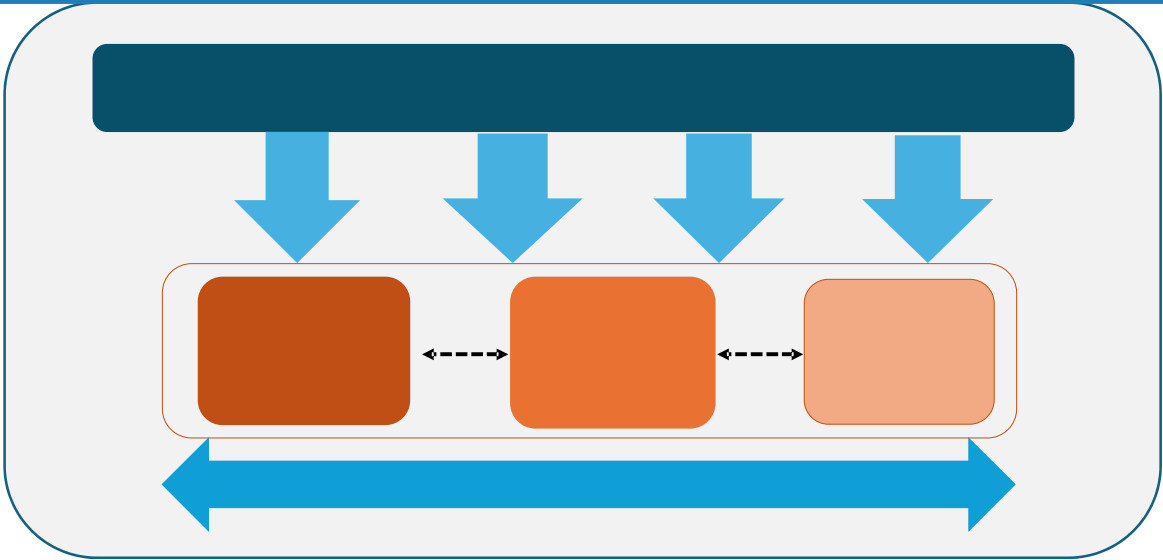
Public health functions and services are situated **both within the health sector and in allied sectors**

Current approach to public health governance is **siloed**

Lack of intersectoral accountability mechanisms for public health

Scope of activities varies in terms of EPHFs

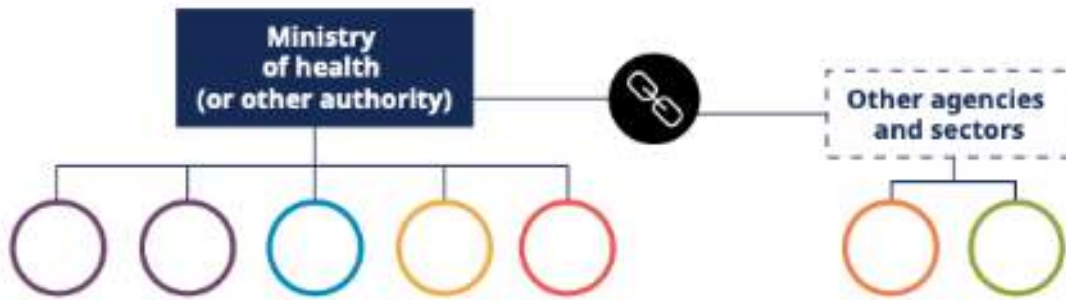
Schematics of four typical existing institutional setups in reference to public health governance



Sector-wide collaborations and coordination for public health is essential

Illustrative national governance structures for Emergency Preparedness and Response

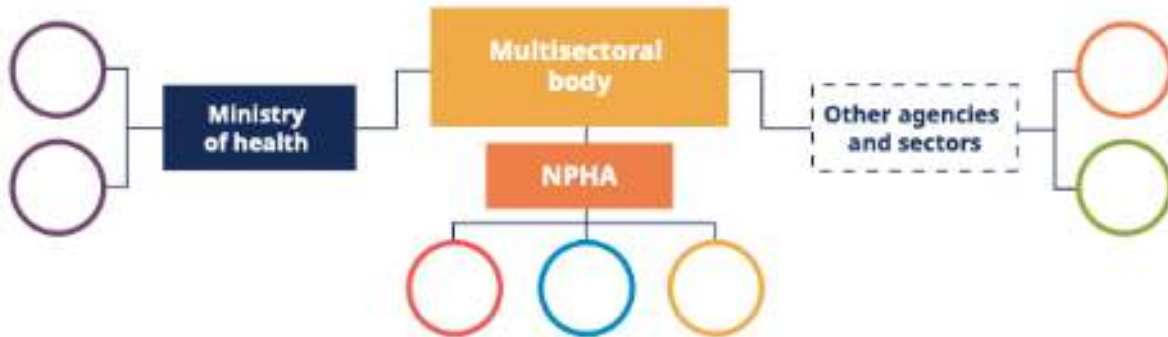
Structure 1. EPR led by ministry of health (or other authority) with no distinct NPHA



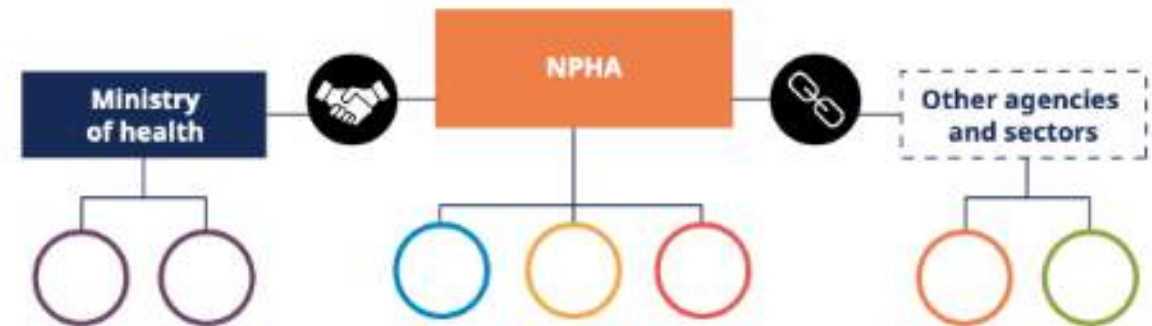
Structure 3. EPR led by ministry of health with NPHA support



Structure 2. EPR led by multisectoral coordinating body with ministry of health and NPHA support



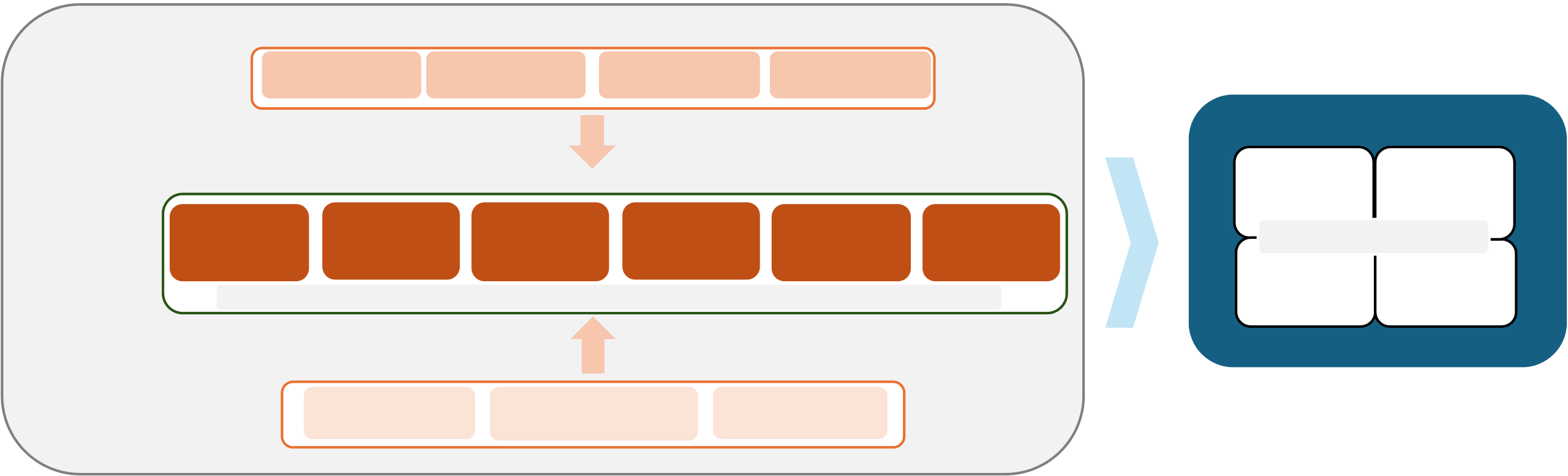
Structure 4. EPR led by NPHA with ministry of health support



NPHA EPR capabilities

Multisectoral linkages

Public health governance framework



Source: Saikat S, Seifeldin R, Zhang Y, et al. Governance for public health across health and allied sectors: a scoping review. *BMJ Public Health* 2025;3:e003542. doi:10.1136/bmjph-2025-003542.
<https://bmjpublichealth.bmj.com/content/3/2/e003542>

Checklist for countries to benchmark the current status and build more robust public health governance

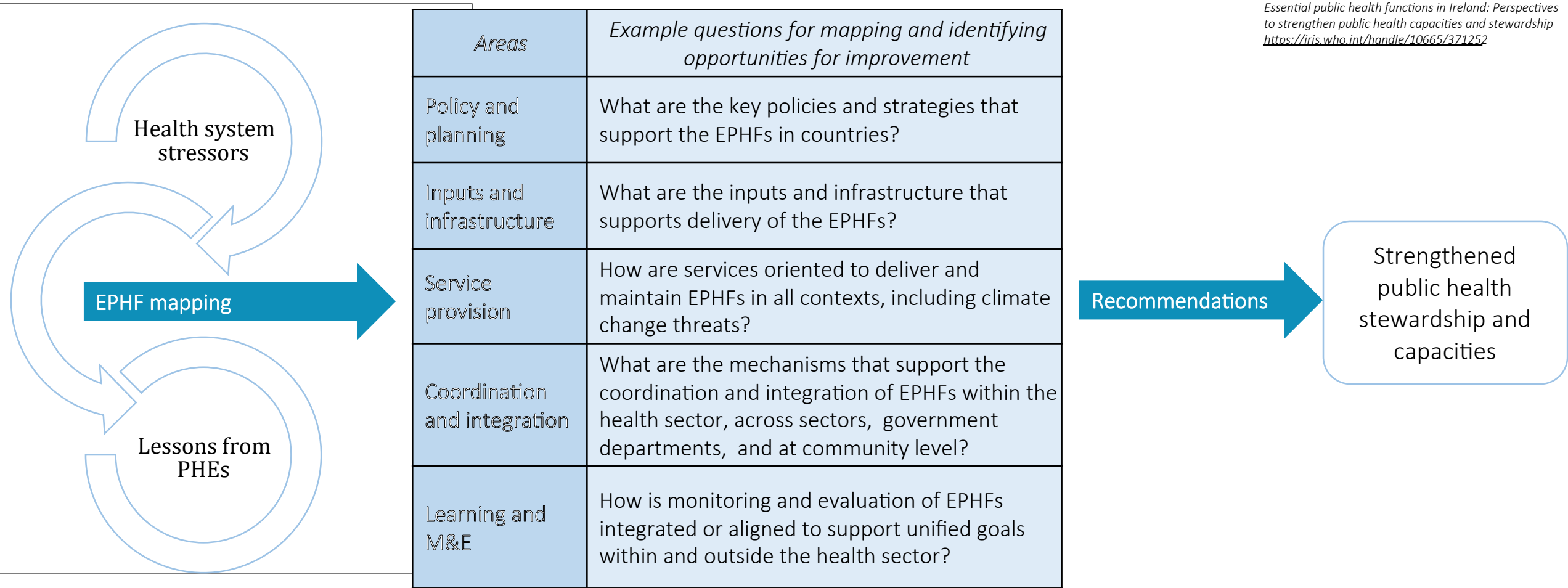
Checklist

- ☐ Public health act (with statutory guidance) or equivalent is in place with:
 - clear articulation of scope of public health using WHO and IANPHI list of EPHFs;
 - defined roles and responsibilities related to the delivery of EPHFs for health and allied sectors;
 - requirement for reviews of the public health act in reference to institutional set-up in the delivery of EPHFs in line with current and future burden of diseases and population health needs.
- ☐ There is a designated entity or mechanism for public health agreed by the government responsible for delivery, coordination and oversight of EPHFs.
- ☐ Sufficient and sustainable budget is allocated to public health (whether through individual national budget line item, ministry of health budget, or shared budget with other sectors).
- ☐ There is a designated public health focal point in health service delivery and all allied sectors, to support coordination with dedicated entity for public health.
- ☐ Public health is identified as a priority by head of government along with stakeholders in allied sectors, to support a Health-in-All-Policies approach.
- ☐ Comprehensive approach to monitoring and well instituted accountability mechanisms for public health governance are established in reference to operation, scientific independence, coordination, and public health service delivery.

Setting the baseline public health capacity and stewardship underpinning EPHFs - Ireland



Essential public health functions in Ireland: Perspectives to strengthen public health capacities and stewardship
<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/371252>



Setting the public health capacity and stewardship underpinning EPHFs - Ireland

Example in Ireland:

- A strategic, flexible and rapid approach to reviewing EPHFs, in reference to thematic areas:

- Policy & planning
- Inputs & infrastructure
- Service delivery
- Coordination & integration
- M&E and learning

- Inform public health reform post-COVID-19

Table 1. Visual high level summary of delivery of essential public health functions in Ireland

		Essential public health function*											
Themes	Technical areas	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Policy & planning	Legislative frameworks												
	Key policies & strategies												
	Design & prioritisation												
	Incorporation into planning												
Inputs & infrastructure	Inputs & infrastructure												
	Impact & influence												
Service delivery	Resource allocation process												
	Incorporation of prevention and promotion												
	Stakeholder involvement												
Coordination & integration	Mechanisms to support coordination												
	Monitoring & evaluation												
Cross cutting	Systematic learning												

Limited consideration for EPHFs within specific technical area
 Some degree of consideration for EPHFs within specific technical area
 EPHFs strongly considered and integrated within technical area

Ref: Essential public health functions in Ireland: perspectives to strengthen public health capacities and stewardship. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2023.

<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240057449>

Team Europe Initiative to strengthening public health institutes in Africa

EU's Team Europe Initiative for support to public health institutes in Africa to deliver essential public health functions and services



EN

THIS ACTION IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

ANNEX 2

to the Commission Implementing Decision on the financing of the multiannual action plan in favour of Sub-Saharan Africa for 2024-2025

Action Document for Support to African Public Health Institutes

MULTIANNUAL PLAN

This document constitutes the multiannual work programme within the meaning of Article 110(2) of the Financial Regulation, within the meaning of Article 23 of the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation.

3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTION

3.1 Objectives and Expected Outputs

The Overall Objective of this action is to contribute to the population's health and wellbeing (SDG 3) via the provision of essential public health services by National Public Health Institutes (NPHIs).

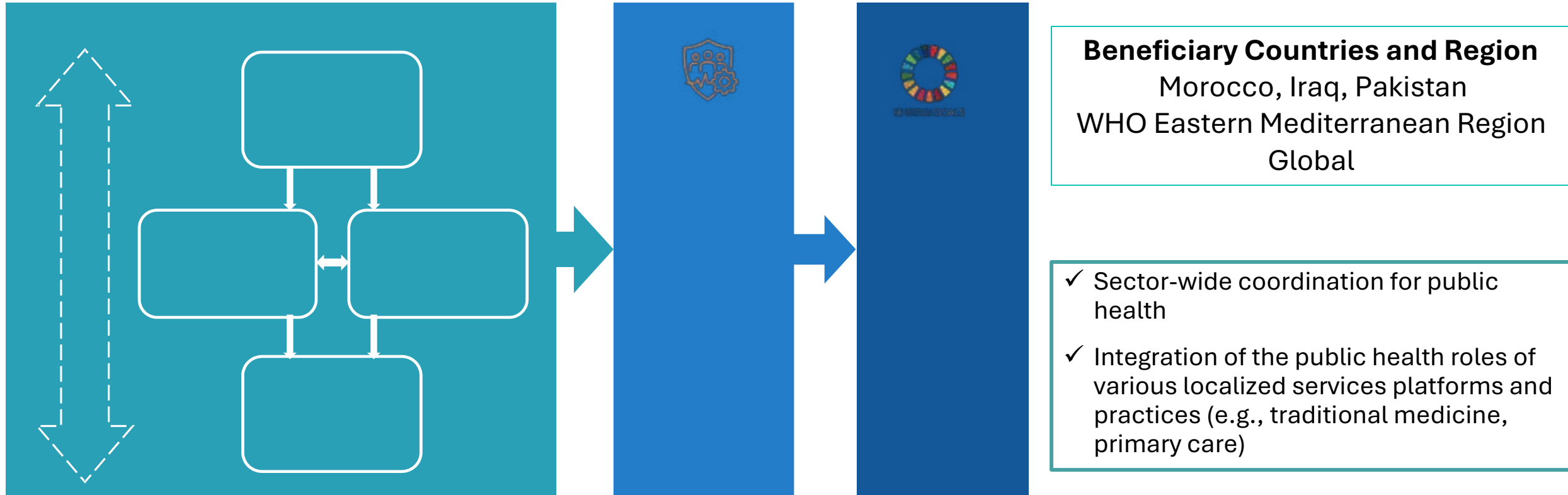
The Specific Objectives of this action are to

1. Establish/enhance regional and international links and capacity among African and European NPHIs for public health research, knowledge and information gathering that drive evidence-based policy advice, public health workforce training, and advocacy;
2. Enhance NPHI capacity development to deliver Core public health functions;
3. To support NPHIs to become digital health leaders on the sustainable use and effectiveness of digital applications and to reduce the digital skills gap for each of the targeted countries.

Guinea-Bissau: Strengthening INASA's role in delivering and coordinating essential public health functions	Nigeria: Strengthening the coordination of public health institutions for EPHF implementation
Zimbabwe: Establishing the National Public Health Institute of Zimbabwe, including necessary legal and regulatory framework, strategy and roadmap, etc.	Central African Republic: Development of the National Institute of Public Health with a clear legal, organizational and financial framework, capable of effectively coordinating EPHFs.

Strengthening essential public health functions and services across localized services platforms and practices

CIDCA's support to projects on strengthening health systems resilience and essential public health functions

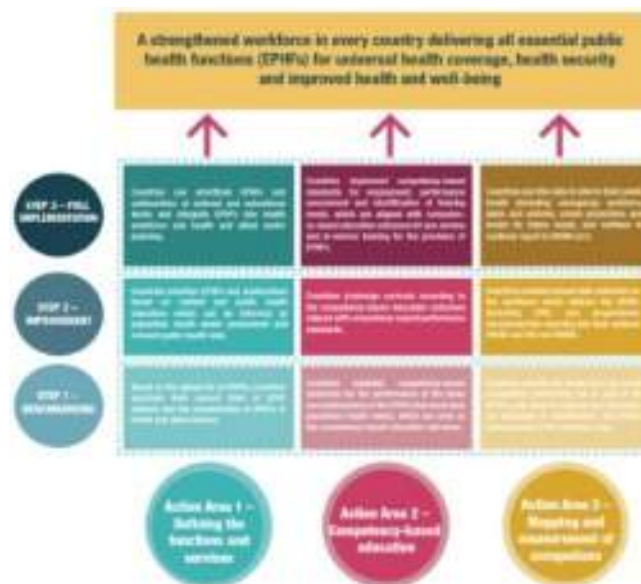
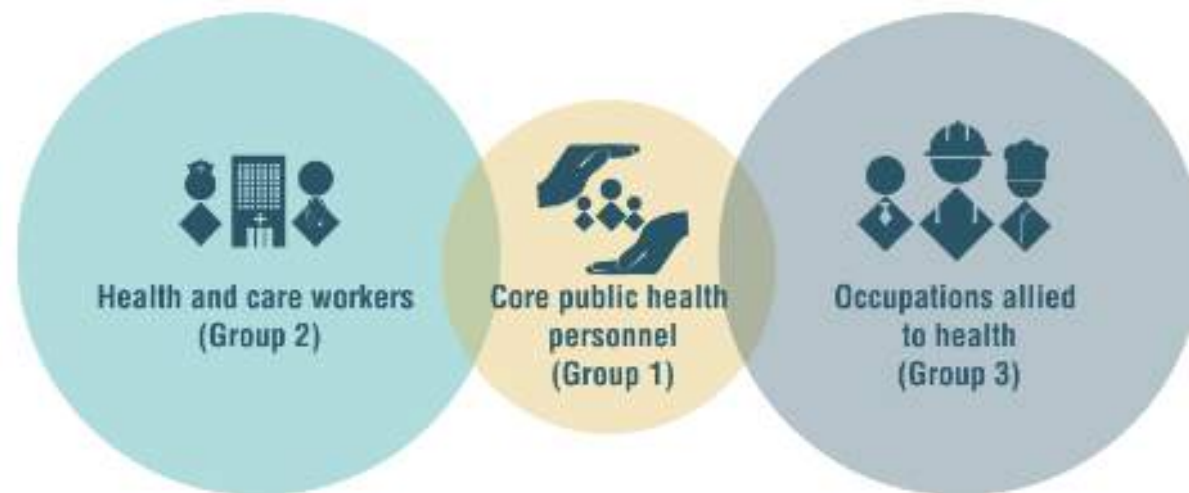


National workforce capacity for essential public health functions delivery & stewardship

VISION: A strengthened workforce in every country; delivering all the EPHFs including EPR for UHC, health security and improved health and wellbeing



- >70 partners (associations, institutions and schools of public health), as of April 2026
- Operating in ~150 countries
- **SEARO and WPRO:** Maldives, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Thailand, and Timor-Leste



Technical resources (selected)



<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240038929>



<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240088306>



<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240091436>



<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240113596>



<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240122505>



<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240122888>



<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240057449>

Reference list of public health services, including the roles of primary care

More resources on essential public health functions and health systems resilience:

- <https://www.who.int/teams/primary-health-care/health-systems-resilience>
- <https://www.who.int/teams/primary-health-care/health-systems-resilience/essential-public-health-functions>



Thank you



Contact: Sohel Saikat, saikats@who.int

Visit relevant resources at

<https://www.who.int/teams/primary-health-care/health-systems-resilience>

<https://www.who.int/teams/primary-health-care/health-systems-resilience/essential-public-health-functions>

