



Senior Officials' Meeting

30 –31 May 2024

# CAREC 2030: Human Development

July 2023 to June 2024

Central Asia Regional Economic  
Cooperation (CAREC) Program





**CAREC HEALTH SECTOR**  
**PROGRESS REPORT AND WORK PLAN**  
JULY 2023 - JUNE 2024

Reference Document  
Senior Officials' Meeting  
Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation  
30-31 May 2024

## ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease
MC	Ministerial Conference
TA	Technical assistance

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## I. KEY DEVELOPMENTS AND RESULTS

1. Since July 2019, the health sector of the CAREC region has made significant strides in supporting health security through increased regional cooperation. The *CAREC Health Strategy 2030* and the *CAREC Regional Investment Framework for Health 2022-2027* (RIF) have been instrumental in guiding the priority activities and investments in the region across all the CAREC Health strategic pillars. Meetings of the CAREC Working Group on Health (WGH) and key achievements and progress towards the CAREC Health Results Framework targets during the reporting period are described below.

### A. CAREC Working Group on Health Meeting 2023

2. The fifth CAREC Working Group on Health (WGH) meeting was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 2-3 November 2023, with Georgia as the CAREC chair country and Kazakhstan as host country. CAREC WGH members, other CAREC country delegates, and ADB staff and consultants were in attendance. The meeting provided a platform for the countries to share progress on implementing the CAREC Health Strategy and the RIF (refer to Table 1), exchange knowledge on climate change and health, and update the RIF to include climate and health actions.

**Table 1. Country Implementation Progress across the CAREC Health Strategic Pillars and Cross-cutting Themes**

<b>Pillar 1 - Leadership and Human Resource Capacity</b>
Implementation progress was significant but variable across the countries. Many revised or adapted national laws and regulations focused on health security or developed new strategies to address future challenges and have worked on institutional arrangements for outbreak/pandemic response. Some countries focused on strengthening their health systems, response mechanisms, and human resources while others embarked on major health sector reforms to expand the benefits and increase population coverage with pooled and publicly managed healthcare resources. Challenges remain regarding coordination within the health sector and across sectors, governance, sustainable and adequate funding for public health and health security, and human resource shortages and capacities across the strategic pillars.
<b>Pillar 2 – Technical Preparedness</b>
Five Central Asian countries raised \$27 million through the Pandemic Fund for a regional program to enhance surveillance systems, strengthen laboratory networks, and improve public health workforce capacities. Kazakhstan received \$19 million from the Pandemic Fund for similar purposes. With development partner support, almost all the countries strengthened their laboratory capacity for better disease outbreak preparation and are developing digital information systems for better surveillance and laboratory management. Remaining challenges are shortage in sustainable recurrent funding for laboratories, lack of qualified laboratory personnel, and weak linkage between human and animal health surveillance systems at a national level to enhance One Health approach to health security.

### Pillar 3 – Surge Demand and Access to Supplies

Countries are making some progress in strengthening their national procurement system, drug registration procedures, and exploring possible collaboration with other national regulatory authorities of CAREC countries. Georgia established state mandates and systems for information-sharing to monitor stocks and prices of pharmaceutical products and detect drug supply shortages. Enhancing capacity of national regulatory authorities and regulatory frameworks is a prominent need within a sub-set of countries in the CAREC region.

### Pillar 4 - Vulnerable Population Groups and Border Health

A series of projects are being carried out by countries, including cross-border surveillance and prevention and control of major infectious disease. Countries are working together to prevent the health risks of cross-border mobile populations and provide basic public health services. Many are enhancing their surveillance activities (e.g., introducing preventive examinations among migrant workers leaving/returning to the country) at border crossing points, and some are planning to implement research on the prevalence of infectious diseases among migrants and organize a joint simulation training with transboundary regions.

### Cross-cutting Themes

Progress was also reported on the cross-cutting theme digital health where digital tools are being developed and used for numerous purposes, such as surveillance, drug management, and laboratory systems.

3. The expert panel discussion on building climate resilient and low-carbon health systems in the region highlighted ways to protect health from a full range of rising climate risks and how the health sector can contribute to reducing carbon emissions. Countries formulated joint actions on climate change and health to update the RIF, including assessing vulnerabilities and capacities of the health systems and communities, modelling climate changes and impacts for the next 20 years, strengthening multisectoral emergency preparedness, enhancing surveillance systems for climate-sensitive diseases, and investing in climate-resilient health infrastructure and energy efficient medical equipment.

4. CAREC country representatives present in the meeting fully endorsed the two deliverables:

- (a) Repository of Training Programs on Health Security, and
- (b) outline of the CAREC Health Cooperation Knowledge Platform for WGH Members.

### **B. Intercountry Dialogues for Ensuring the Quality of Imported Medicines**

5. From July to September 2023 under the support of the regional technical assistance (TA) [\*Addressing Regional Health Threats in CAREC and the Caucasus\*](#), drug regulatory authorities of Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyz Republic have been engaging in dialogues to identify areas of possible cooperation to strengthen capacities for ensuring the quality of imported medicines. Representatives from these agencies gathered at a side-meeting during the fifth WGH meeting in November 2023 where common challenges were identified, including limited capabilities for import control; the need to eliminate unnecessary duplication of work in laboratory testing; lack of adequate mechanisms for accepting/relying on the scientific assessment and inspection outcomes generated by third countries; small market size entailing low interest from manufacturers in entering these markets; and work conducted in isolation due to non-existent inter-country contacts. Priority areas

were identified where development support would be needed, such as advice for reviewing national legislation and regulations to seek ways to harmonize regulatory requirements and initiate international/regional collaborative work among CAREC regulatory authorities; facilitating mutual visits and experience sharing to break isolation and improve self- and mutual confidence; exploring the feasibility of an IT platform to allow for joint/parallel assessment of pharmaceuticals and paving the way to a collective move towards more efficient and cooperative drug regulation.

6. In February 2024, ADB organized a meeting to explore possible synergies between the regulatory and procurement and supply components. Potential cooperation between countries could encompass means and procedures to ensure the quality of imported products and cooperation between regulators and procurement systems at the respective national levels as a first step toward creating the conditions for joint evaluation of suppliers and joint procurement initiatives.

### **C. Regional Mechanisms for Health Procurement and Supply Chain**

7. A consulting firm has been engaged under the TA since October 2023 to (a) develop a comprehensive regional risk management plan for health supply chains, (b) recommend, design and pilot a fit-for-purpose mechanism/platform that will facilitate regional sharing of market information on selected hard-to-access medical products among CAREC members, and (c) conduct a situational analysis and feasibility study for cross-border collaborative procurement arrangements among CAREC members that could help improve regional health security and access to essential medicines and medical supplies.

8. A Procurement and Supply Chain Management Sub-Working Group on Health (PSM SWGH) was established at the beginning of 2024 with appointed representatives from CAREC member countries. An inaugural meeting of the PSM SWGH was held in March 2024 and a second technical meeting on the design of the regional risk management plan was held in April 2024.

9. The following outputs are expected for 2024: (i) feasibility study report and draft journal publication for cross-border collaborative procurement arrangements, (ii) a regional risk management plan, and (iii) a functional pilot of a market information sharing mechanism or platform.

#### **1. Regional resource of health security trainings**

10. A repository has been developed under the TA for the latest available training programs related to health security offered by different entities (e.g., universities, public health centers, research centers, international organizations) in the CAREC region. These training programs are relevant for the core competencies of the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) to identify, respond to and control public health threats and potential public health emergencies of international concern. The repository also provides information on location of each training, length, languages they are offered, required qualification for enrollment, and the quality assurance mechanisms the providing institute/organization undergoes, if any. The repository will be made accessible through the CAREC Health Cooperation Knowledge Platform.

### **D. CAREC Health Cooperation Knowledge Platform**

11. The CAREC Health Cooperation Knowledge Platform is ready to be launched on the CAREC Health website. It has been designed to be an interactive web portal to inform on the CAREC Health institutional set-up, past and upcoming CAREC health events, and financing

opportunities in the region. The platform is also a valuable resource, providing easy access to key documents such as the CAREC Health Strategy 2030 and RIF, country briefs on health security and health systems, and repositories on innovative solutions for addressing CAREC and Caucasus health threats, and available training programs in the region related to health security. All CAREC health webinar materials will also be accessible through the platform.

### **E. Other Key Activities**

12. Further, ADB supported the first Global Health Security Summit held in Islamabad on 10 January 2024 and several CAREC countries were invited to participate. The meeting discussed key health security issues such as surveillance and early detection, health systems resilience, research and innovation as well as cooperation.

13. ADB is also supporting the Pandemic Fund applications in Pakistan and Georgia in the second round for which the submission deadline is 17 May 2024. The priority areas under the Pandemic Fund, namely strengthening comprehensive disease surveillance, early warning and response, laboratory systems, and human resources for health capacity are well aligned with the priorities in the CAREC Health Strategy and RIF.

14. Finally, under the TA support, health sector and facility assessments including scoping opportunities for cross-border cooperation are being conducted in Kazakhstan.

### **Key Achievements and Progress toward the CAREC Health Results Framework Targets**

15. The CAREC Health Results Framework sets out the indicators under each of the strategy's four pillars and crosscutting themes to capture the achievements of CAREC health cooperation. The table below provides the main results and progress up to June 2024 under the CAREC Health Results Framework.



Goal	Indicator	2017	Progress as of June 2024
Enhanced regional health security	Number of CAREC countries that incorporate joint regional approaches and cross-sector activities in their UHC (universal health coverage) and/or health sector strategies or plans	N/A	CAREC health strategy recommendations have been incorporated into Georgia's National Health Protection Strategy for 2022-2030. Uzbekistan plans to incorporate cross-border recommendations into its new health sector strategy.
Outcome	Indicator	2017	Progress as of June 2024
Strengthened regional leadership, coordination, and workforce	Number of joint country activities conducted under the CAREC Health Strategy	N/A	Five WGH meetings were held during the reporting period. Webinars were also conducted on collaborative procurement and supply chains, including collaborative procurement as a regional solution. A Procurement and Supply Chain Management Sub- Working Group on Health was established at the beginning of the 2024 to guide the work on regional mechanisms and platforms for procurement and supply chain.
	Number of health-related personnel (sex-disaggregated) trained through CAREC support to address issues related to health security	N/A	The CAREC health webinars attracted a total of 230 attendees with 187 individual participants (health- related personnel), 58% of them being women.
Improved surveillance and laboratory infrastructure	Number of CAREC countries using harmonized surveillance data and common analysis criteria	N/A	Azerbaijan and Georgia have started to exchange monthly epidemiological data for seven border districts. A series of intercountry dialogues have been held to identify areas of possible cooperation to strengthen capacities for ensuring the quality of imported medicines. Plans are underway to establish a data exchange mechanism for selected Tajikistan and Uzbekistan border districts.
Increased capacity to access supplies and meet surge demands	Regional cooperation mechanism established to strengthen regulatory capacity	0	Webinars were held on regional mechanisms for strengthening drug regulatory capacity to ensure the quality of imported medicines in CAREC countries. Intercountry dialogues have been Plans are underway to organize collaborative activities such as joint assessment of applications regarding medical products identified as common priority by national regulatory authorities.
	Number of regional procurement mechanisms developed (from information sharing to actual procurement)	0	Webinar was held to provide foundational concepts on collaborative procurement. Under the guidance of the PSM SWGH, a firm has been engaged and is conducting a feasibility study for cross-border collaborative procurement arrangements and designing a pilot on regional sharing of market information on selected hard-to-access

			medical products.
Enhanced health services for migrant groups, border communities, and vulnerable groups	Research conducted on the needs of CAREC cross-border communities and mobile populations, including women and vulnerable groups	0	A draft concept note has been developed to conduct a survey in selected border areas. Assessment of border health facilities is also being planned.
	Number of regional collaboration initiatives for cross-border support to migrants with chronic infectious diseases (e.g., TB, HIV)	0	Workshops on establishing and sharing migrant Electronic Medical Records and case referrals across borders (including for TB and HIV) are being planned.
Disaggregation of data by gender assured; specific needs of women considered in health planning and design of services and infrastructure	Research conducted on the sex-differentiated effects of the outbreaks and pandemics, especially on female health workers, female patients, and on households with female heads	0	A draft concept note has been developed to conduct a survey in selected border areas.

## II. CHALLENGES AND KEY ISSUES

16. To allow for more technical discussions more sub-working groups will be established in the future to allow discussions across different health security and health systems topics. This would entail enlisting technical professionals to ensure more country guidance and ownership of deliverables are developed.

## III. WORK PROGRAM FOR 2024

17. The table below summarizes the planned activities and expected outputs for the rest of 2024. These activities and outputs are aligned with country priorities and are detailed in the RIF.

Strategic Pillar	Objective	Output and Activity
1: Leadership and Human Resource Capacity	Enhance health security preparedness and response capacity	▪ Support countries' Pandemic Fund applications as per need and request
	Strengthen human resources for appropriate and effective health response measures	▪ Sub-working Group on Human Resources for Health to be established and operational
2: Technical Preparedness	Improve access to and use of regional health data for health emergency prevention, preparedness and response	▪ Design and publish regional health security dashboard via CARINFONET. ▪ Implement pilot to strengthen and digitize sentinel surveillance of Azerbaijan.

3: Surge Demand and Access to Supplies	Enhance capacities of national regulatory authorities and regional reliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organize intercountry dialogues and initiate effective exchange of information/experience on foreign manufacturers among selected CAREC countries.</li> </ul>
	Improve regional supply security by strengthening cross-country collaboration on procurement of essential public health products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct feasibility assessment on establishing regional mechanism(s) for aggregating demand, group contracting or pooled procurement of essential public health supplies.</li> <li>Design a pilot on regional sharing of market information on selected hard-to-access medical products.</li> </ul>
4: Vulnerable Population Groups and Border Health	Improve understanding of border health conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plan survey among border communities and mobile populations on their health status, needs, access to health services, and effects of outbreaks and pandemics.</li> <li>Assessment of service availability and quality of selected border health facilities.</li> </ul>
Crosscutting Theme: Digital Health	Improve technical capacities on digital health foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct digital health webinars on cybersecurity.</li> </ul>

#### IV. DELIVERABLES FOR THE 2023 MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

18. The following list provides an overview of deliverables until the end of 2024.

Deliverables	Timing (2024)	SOM/MC action
The CAREC Health Cooperation Knowledge Platform launched	Q3	For information
Sub-working group on Human Resources for Health established with country dialogues on development of health workforce registries and Strategic vision of a regional training center drafted	Q4	For information
Summary report on effective exchange of information/experience on foreign manufacturers among selected CAREC countries.	Q4	For information
Feasibility study report and draft journal publication for cross-border collaborative procurement arrangements, regional risk management plan for health supply chains, and report on pilot of a market information sharing mechanism or platform	Q4	For information
Plan and tools for the survey among border communities and mobile populations on their health status, needs, access to health services, and effects of outbreaks and pandemics.	Q4	For information
Plan and tools for the assessment of service availability and quality of selected border health facilities.	Q4	For information

# CAREC EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

1. On education and skills development, the inception meeting and expert roundtable under the *TA on Strengthening Regional Cooperation on Skills Development under the CAREC Program* was held in Tbilisi in May 2022 and focused on key developments, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration on skills development in the CAREC Region. Upon the change in the TA team leader due to the internal reorganization in ADB, the TA and its scope and future activities are being reviewed.

2. To conduct needs assessment and engage Ministries of Education and Labour from CAREC countries in the implementation of the TA and to align activities of the TA with emerging challenges of the region, the CAREC Working Group on Skills Development (Skill WG) was launched in Tashkent on 29 February to 1 March 2024. The proposed action plan of the Skills WG was shared and discussed during the meeting in Tashkent. TA will support the Skills WG through specific policy and thematic research activities, expert group discussions, briefs, and others to feed the discussion during regular meetings and implementation of agreements. Key international development partners with regional programs in higher education and skills development will be invited to the initiative. During the meeting, senior officials, and representatives of major agriculture universities from 10 CAREC member countries also explored the establishment of the CAREC Agriculture Universities' Network for climate action, climate-proof agriculture, and water resources management. It was agreed that the higher education institutions should drive climate change research, fostering innovation and developing cutting-edge solutions to address the climate challenges that CAREC region is facing now. The Network will explore student exchanges, introduction of joint degree programs, faculty exchanges, research collaborations, and mutual recognition of skills and qualifications under this TA. TA also aims to enhance capacities of partner government agencies on green skills, climate change, and just transition. TA will support the organization of a series of activities to increase the awareness of the government counterparts on the importance of approaches to analyze and mainstream climate change considerations and prioritize green skills into education and labor policies, qualification frameworks, curricula, and training materials.