About The Asia Pacific Leaders’ Malaria Alliance

What is APLMA?

The Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance (APLMA) is an affiliation of Asian and Pacific Heads of Government, formed to accelerate progress against malaria and to eliminate the disease in the region by 2030.

APLMA was formally established by the 2013 East Asia Summit in response to Leaders’ concerns about the rising risks of malaria resurgence, in particular due to increasing drug-resistant malaria in the Greater Mekong sub-region. By virtue of its Heads of Government status, APLMA has a policy-making capacity and can establish priorities for action. It works with and through national and international authorities. Firstly, to ensure leaders are informed of the latest scientific evidence, and secondly to assist in translating the collective will of the region’s leaders into coordinated action by relevant authorities.

By 2014, the Alliance secured the agreement of 18 regional Heads of Government to eliminate malaria by 2030. At the 2015 East Asia Summit in Malaysia, 18 Heads of Government unanimously endorsed the Leaders’ Roadmap for Malaria Elimination by 2030.

APLMA has a small secretariat, currently hosted by the Asian Development Bank in Manila. It works closely with two relevant World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Offices, the Asian Development Bank and with the Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network (APMEN). The secretariat will incorporate as an independent entity and relocate to Singapore during 2016.

The mission of the secretariat is to translate this strong political commitment into action to achieve an Asia Pacific region free of malaria and reduced risk from other communicable diseases.

1 Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Viet Nam, Australia, PR China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation and the USA. The Government of Vanuatu formally support at Head of Government level and Papua New Guinea at Secretary level.
APLMA has supported policy action through two expert task forces focused on:

1. Improving access to quality malaria medicines and other technologies such as rapid diagnostic tests, long-lasting bed nets and insecticides; and
2. Regional malaria financing, including exploration of innovative domestic financing mechanisms.

Task force recommendations\(^2\) culminated in the joint proposal to the 2014 EAS that Leaders adopt the goal of an Asia Pacific free of malaria by 2030. In November 2014, that goal was adopted by the 18 Leaders, representing 55% of the world’s population. At their request, the Leaders’ Elimination Roadmap was developed, identifying priority actions to accelerate progress towards the regional malaria elimination goal.

In June 2015, Dr Nafsiah Mboi was appointed APLMA Leaders’ Envoy. In this role, Dr Mboi leads strategic priority-setting for APLMA and guides APLMA’s engagement in global health diplomacy and country-level political engagement.

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\(^2\) See www.aplma.org.

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**Why malaria? A regional public health emergency**

While malaria was once one of the world’s biggest killers, its burden is now much reduced. Yet still today over two billion people in the Asia Pacific region are estimated to be at risk of infection.

Increased trade integration and dynamic population movements are creating new and significant Asia Pacific public health challenges. Malaria, a mosquito-borne infection that may cause lethal complications, is arguably the greatest such challenge. The disease is endemic in 22 countries in the region, causing an estimated 32 million cases and over 47,000 deaths each year. In addition, endemic countries have a large chronic disease burden as millions of people carry the parasite but display no malaria symptoms, contributing to a perpetual cycle of disease transmission. Primarily a disease of poverty, malaria can be prevented and treated through cost-effective interventions, but most countries do not have adequate funding or health infrastructure to cover all populations at risk.
The campaign against malaria is an international health success story. Over the past 15 years, driven by World Health Assembly and Millennium Development Goals, the Asia Pacific region reduced the number of cases and deaths by almost half from 2000 to 2015.

Following this success, it may have seemed timely to shift resources to address other issues. Unfortunately, that simple logic is mistaken. Completing the ‘final mile’ against malaria is critical to protecting what has been achieved to date.

A 2012 study documented 75 instances of malaria resurgence from the past eight decades – the majority linked to premature reductions in funding and other resources. Recent progress is the result of concerted effort and intensified resources. Less of either risks rapid resurgence of the disease. That risk is high now because some of our best tools – malaria medicines and insecticides – are losing their effectiveness. A growth in resistant strains of malaria could see the number of malaria cases – and the number of deaths – increase significantly.

Experts agree the best strategy involves addressing malaria broadly, by strengthening health systems so they are better able to manage the disease – and any other health threats. APLMA targets malaria, but also promotes integrated approaches that tackle the disease as well as strengthening health systems. Increased efforts against malaria must be configured to increase capacity to tackle other diseases and build regional health security.

Why APLMA?

With all of the existing organizations working on malaria there had to be a very clear argument for establishing another body, even a small one that serves leaders directly. Asia Pacific Leaders established APLMA to bolster existing efforts to defeat malaria, and is unique in two respects:

1. It carries the authority of Leaders and therefore can help resolve problems that are outside the scope of health ministries and partner organizations;
2. It spans the Asia Pacific region and is able to identify deficiencies and opportunities in regional public goods, and advise leaders accordingly. APLMA offers the opportunity for high-level engagement on the essential building blocks for malaria elimination, including around research, policy and programme coordination, regulatory collaboration, finance and governance.

APLMA recognizes and complements country efforts led by national governments, supported by WHO.

It also acknowledges the large number of existing organizations working to reduce and eliminate malaria. Part of its function is to enhance coordination and collaboration.

APLMA works on a manageable number of critical priorities that require leaders-level attention and regional collaboration. It works to galvanize leadership at the highest levels of government to:

a) bring difficult policy questions to leaders, for their attention and decision;
b) illuminate and help fill important knowledge and resource gaps at the regional level, and;
c) mobilize the authority and influence of leaders to set clear goals and align everyone in the region to achieve them.

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‘2020 outcomes’ of the APLMA Secretariat

Roadmap priority 1: The Alliance sustains ongoing Leader level recognition, as a platform that promotes accountability and action amongst central agencies, line ministries and other actors. Functions required for elimination that are beyond the remit of any single country are facilitated by countries as part of improved cooperation on health and health security.

Roadmap priority 2: Coverage gaps are identified and highlighted using the Dashboard, providing the visibility required to bring key populations at risk into coverage.

Roadmap priority 3: Countries are increasingly accountable for quality service delivery. The APLMA Secretariat facilitates a strong enabling environment for regulatory systems, supply chains and delivery.

Roadmap priority 4: Develop and deploy an evidence base to support more cost-effective elimination strategies. Engage the private sector more effectively for service delivery.

Roadmap priority 5: The region achieves a transition from excessive reliance on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) external donor financing to sustainable domestic and sub-regional malaria financing.

Roadmap priority 6: Research and Development of innovative technologies and techniques is stimulated in critical areas to finance and deliver elimination.