**SUMMARY**: On February 27th and March 2nd, the APEC Health Working Group (HWG) convened virtually for the first Senior Officials Meeting (SOM1) of 2021. Canada, represented by the Office of International Affairs for the Health Portfolio (OIA) Branch Head, Michael Pearson, co-chaired the meeting alongside the representative from Malaysia, Mr. Fabian Bigar, the Undersecretary of Policy and International Relations Division, as the HWG Alternate Co-Chair. Member economy participants included Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, China, Hong Kong, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, United States, and Vietnam. Other meeting participants included representatives from the Life Sciences Innovation Forum (LSIF), the APEC Digital Hub for Mental Health, and the APEC Secretariat. Representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO) Headquarters, the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office, the Office of the Covax Facility at Gavi, the Pan-American Health Organization, and the International Agency for Research on Cancer were also invited as guests.

As a government forum, HWG member economies discussed and reflected on the continued impacts of COVID-19 to economies, societies and health systems. The HWG meeting featured important and relevant discussions for the region’s continued recovery such as COVID-19 vaccination rollout and digital health technologies, which allowed APEC member economies to share their domestic experiences as well as their challenges. HWG members reflected on the need to continue to address vaccine confidence and leverage digital technologies to facilitate immunization. Furthermore, the HWG meeting also featured discussions on the significant impact that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) had on the region before COVID-19, now exacerbated due to the pandemic. Member economies highlighted the trends they have observed in their economies related to NCDs and COVID-19 as well as the efforts they have implemented to balance their approach. Although interventions were limited during the meeting’s administrative agenda items, the two policy discussions on COVID-19 vaccination and NCDs received a number of interventions from economies demonstrating the continued importance of policy discussions during the HWG meetings.

The following key items and deliverables were endorsed:

* HWG Work Plan 2021;
* Process for the Post- 2020 APEC Roadmap for Mental Health; and
* Dementia Spotlight Report.

Looking ahead, the following are key upcoming deliverables for 2021:

* Endorsement of the APEC Vaccination Action Plan Across the Life Course;
* Endorsement of the *“The North Star” – A Healthy Asia-Pacific* Strategic Document;
* HWG Report to the Steering Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation (SCE);
* Post-2020 APEC Roadmap for Mental Health in a Healthy Asia Pacific; and,
* Joint Emergency Preparedness Working Group (EPWG) and HWG Policy Dialogue – Strengthening Health Systems Resilience: Post COVID-19 *(TBC)*

**DAY ONE**

*Saturday, February 27th, 2021*

1. **OPENING SESSION**
   1. **Introductory Remarks by HWG Co-Chairs**

HWG Co-Chairs, Mr. Michael Pearson (Canada) and Mr. Fabian Bigar (Malaysia) provided introductory remarks where they thanked member economies for their commitment in participating in the 2021 HWG virtual meeting, and emphasized the importance of continuing the discussion and exchanging best practices and lessons learned as COVID-19 continues to demonstrate just how devastating health issues can be to our societies and economies.

Mr. Pearson also emphasized that while the introduction and approvals of COVID-19 vaccines has shown a light at the end of the tunnel, there are still many lessons we must reflect on from our respective and collective COVID-19 experience.

Further, Mr. Pearson noted that the HWG is currently under review by the Steering Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation (SCE), which will determine whether the HWG’s mandate will be extended for another four years. He highlighted the important role the HWG plays within APEC in supporting the region’s health and economic recovery from COVID-19, working closely with global and regional health partners, such as the World Health Organization.

Mr. Pearson then noted the number of economies virtually present to determine whether the HWG had achieved quorum. Despite the several time zones, the HWG achieved quorum with 18 of 21 APEC economies present.

Mr. Fabian also took the opportunity to inform the HWG that Datuk Dr. Chong Chee Kheong was not able to join the SOM1 meeting as he is currently involved with the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out programme in Malaysia. Additionally, Mr. Fabian encouraged all member economies to continue working together with the focus on addressing health related threats and opportunities in further promoting economic growth and enhancing equitable sharing of benefits.

Finally, Dr. Pongsadhorn Pokpermdee from Thailand was recognized for taking on the Vice-Chair role of the HWG.

* 1. **Adoption of SOM3 HWG Meeting Agenda**

As it is customary at HWG meetings, Mr. Pearson opened the floor for comments on the draft of the HWG SOM1 2021 Meeting Agenda.

China intervened to clarify whether Agenda item 6.1 regarding the APEC Vaccination Action Plan across the Life Course would be a discussion on the Action Plan and not for endorsement. China noted that they understood that the Action Plan had been discussed during the Life Sciences Innovation Forum (LSIF) Planning Group meeting, and according to consensus from last year’s HWG meeting, only the progress of the action plan should be discussed during HWG Meeting, while the endorsement process of the Action Plan should first be endorsed within LSIF before endorsement within the HWG.

Mr. Pearson clarified that Agenda item 6.1 on the Vaccination Action Plan was indeed an opportunity for US representatives to provide an update and that they would not be seeking endorsement from the HWG.

Seeing no further comments, the SOM1 2021 HWG Agenda was officially adopted.

1. **REVIEW OF 2020 DELIVERABLES**
   1. **Joint Statement and Joint Activities – 10th High Level Meeting on Health and the Economy**

Mr. Pearson underscored that while 2020 was an unprecedented year, the HWG still managed to accomplish a lot through its flexibility and commitment to achieve many of the deliverables that were set in the 2020 Work Plan.

For instance, the HWG co-hosted with the LSIF the first virtual High Level Meeting on Health and the Economy (HLM10). HLM10 highlighted that “there is no wealth without health”, and how the exchange of experiences and best practices are critical to shape and inform domestic and international policies in addressing current health issues, while improving health systems in the long run and enabling strong economic growth. HLM10 also featured three panel discussions that highlighted key actions towards building a resilient region such as:

* The economic imperative for investing in health;
* Building resilient and sustainable systems through vaccination and supply chains; and
* Harnessing the digital economy in the health sector.

As an outcome of the HLM10 meeting, the HWG and LSIF issued a joint statement noting the outcomes of the meeting, and the importance of continued partnership and collaboration for a resilient and prosperous future. Mr. Pearson also took the opportunity to emphasize the importance of the HLM as it has been instrumental in bringing together APEC Health Ministers with academia and industry to discuss important health issues and its impact in the Asia-Pacific region.

Furthermore, Mr. Pearson took this time to commend Malaysia, as last year’s host economy, as well as all other APEC economies for their participation in last years’ meetings including HLM10.

LSIF Chair, Ms. Erika Elvander, also took the opportunity to thank Malaysia as the 2020 host economy for being flexible and resilient to successfully conducting the meetings.

* 1. **Leaders Declaration and Joint Ministerial Declaration**

Mr. Fabian highlighted that APEC Ministers met virtually for the annual APEC Ministerial Meeting on November 16th, 2020. Ministers assessed the forum’s achievements in 2020, provided guidance on future work, and discussed preparations for the 2020 APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting. He noted that an outcome of their meeting was a Joint Ministerial Statement. This Statement recognized the need to support innovation to safeguard the region from health threats and strengthen the resilience of health systems and quality of healthcare, including through the utilisation of digital technologies.

Mr. Fabian also noted that the APEC Economic Leaders’ met virtually for the APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting on November 20th, 2020. The outcome of this meeting was the 2020 Kuala Lumpur Declaration, which reaffirmed the need to cooperate constructively on COVID-19 including the research and development, production, manufacturing and distribution of medical countermeasures such as diagnostic tests, essential medical products and services, therapeutics and vaccines. In addition, it also highlighted the importance of digital technologies and how it can support the enhancement of our health systems towards universal health coverage.

Furthermore, the meeting also highlighted the importance of facilitating equitable access to safe, quality, effective and affordable vaccines and other medical countermeasures that are vital to safeguard people’s health and well-being, while incentivising innovation. Additionally, the role of extensive immunisation against COVID-19 in order to bring the pandemic to an end was acknowledged.

Along the year 2020, discussions on COVID-19 pandemic issues was given priority, whereby all member economies recognized the major efforts and actions undertaken by all affected member economies to control the spread of COVID-19 and reaffirm the central importance of collaboration at all levels to combat this infectious disease. For this, every economy should maintain their commitment this year and continue working together towards COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery.

Moving forward, all APEC economies should reflect on these words by APEC Ministers and Leaders to continue the important work in safeguarding people’s health and protecting the region from health threats. This will be important for APEC to remain relevant and true to its core objectives.

1. **APEC 2021 THEME**
   1. **APEC New Zealand 2021 Theme and Priorities**

On behalf of New Zealand, Ms. Megan McCoy presented the three key policy priorities for their 2021 APEC host year, which were developed on the premise of economic recovery post COVID-19, addressing regional trends, transformations and challenges and implementing the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040. The three key policy priorities include:

* Economic and Trade Policies that Strengthen Recovery;
* Increasing Inclusion and Sustainability for Recovery; and
* Pursuing Innovation and a Digitally-Enabled Recovery.

As COVID-19 has resulted in the most serious economic contraction globally, the policy priorities for APEC 2021 aim to chart the course through the COVID-19 response and lay the foundations for an inclusive, sustainable and resilient recovery. Furthermore, New Zealand’s policy priorities for APEC 2021 aim to identify where APEC can best direct its efforts to respond to these regional trends, transformations and challenges. Following the agreement of the APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040, a top priority for New Zealand in 2021 will be to lead the development of the Implementation Plan for the new vision.

1. **2021 HWG Work Plan**
   1. **Review of Draft 2021 HWG Work Plan**

Mr. Pearson outlined the draft 2021 HWG Work Plan document, highlighting the HWG’s theme of *“Response, Rebalance, Recover. Together”,* which complements the APEC 2021 *theme “Join, Work, Grow. Together”,* and noted that several activities have been proposed to align with the theme.

Before opening up the floor for comments on the 2021 Work Plan, Mr. Pearson stated that following the conclusion of the SOM1 HWG meetings, the Co-Chairs office will send out the list of sub-working groups outlining their current members. This will be an opportunity for member economies to express their desire to sign up for a sub-working group and assist with the HWG’s achievement of specific Work Plan deliverables.

On the Draft 2021 Work Plan, Mr. Pearson highlighted that this document is a collective work, which involves cross-fora collaboration to support the work plan. However, there have been concerns from one member economy in terms of the language being used on the first page, third paragraph, specifically noting the: “…..*disproportionate impact of the crisis on the poor, women, children, ethnic minorities, racialized people, Indigenous peoples and other marginalized and vulnerable groups.*”.

Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand intervened to express their support in retaining the language being used in the 2021 Work Plan. Canada noted that ethnic minorities and racialized populations have been overrepresented in COVID-19 infections, and therefore removing these populations from the Work Plan would not recognize the particular and disproportionate impact the pandemic has had in these communities. The US also noted that COVID-19 has very much disproportionately impacted people of colour in the US, and would strongly support the terminology to be included in the Work Plan. Australia and New Zealand also supported the comments made by Canada and the US. China intervened to indicate that they did not agree with the proposed language in the introductory paragraph as these terms have never been discussed in APEC. While China recognized the impacts COVID-19 has had on vulnerable groups, they proposed that these groups not be included in the Draft 2021 Work Plan.

Other comments on the Work Plan were made by the Philippines, who requested including the amendment of Concept Note Protocol (replacement of the criteria 1 and 2 of the endorsement checklist) in the 2021 Work Plan, specifically due to the expiration of the Healthy-Asia Pacific 2020 (HAP2020).

Both Co-Chairs proposed to postpone the discussion of the 2021 Work Plan for Day Two, provided that there are suggestions from member economies on the suitable alternative language. The Co-Chairs noted that they would also engage in with internal discussions on this matter.

1. **BRIEFING ON HWG CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2021**
   1. **HWG Meetings (SOM1 & SOM3)**

This agenda item served as an opportunity to discuss the calendar of events for the 2021 HWG meetings, including the tentative dates for the SOM3 HWG and HLM11 meeting dates. As of now, the tentative dates for SOM3 are from August 10th until September 3rd, 2021 which will follow the same format as these first HWG meetings. The meeting dates for HLM11 are still to be determined.

* 1. **Discussion on whether there is interest in having a High-Level Meeting on Health and the Economy**

Mr. Fabian proceeded to a discussion on the High-Level Meeting on Health and the Economy (HLM11) as New Zealand are still determining whether there will be an HLM11. This discussion was an opportunity to seek whether HWG members were interested in having an HLM, and if so, what potential discussions could happen during a potential HLM. New Zealand has asked that the decision be officially made after SOM1.

Mr. Fabian also highlighted that the HLM is an intergovernmental forum (minister-level) for the APEC economies to examine the health relations with the economy and to facilitate high level attention to key issues identified as priorities for the region. As the platform attracts the involvement of Health Ministers and Deputy Ministers; senior health, economic, and trade officials; academic and business leaders; and senior representatives of international and regional organizations, every HLM that convened has come out with a specific theme to specifically focus on health-related issues.

On behalf of the US, Ms. Erika indicated support of an HLM to convene during SOM3 and also briefly highlighted the importance of the HLM. Malaysia echoed the intervention made by US.

Chinese Taipei also supported the HLM to be held as it will attract Health Ministers’ participations duo to saving travel time in virtual way and as a solidarity to show commitment of high level management especially during COVID-19 pandemic.

On the same page, Canada also indicated its support for an HLM and noted that hosting an HLM in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic would further emphasize the value of improving the health to economic growth and development, in ensuring shared prosperity for the APEC region.

Mr. Fabian appreciated all comments by economies, which will be useful before an official decision will be made.

1. **VACCINATION ACTION PLAN AND VACCINATION PROGRAMME OF WORK**
   1. **Vaccination Action Plan Update: Next Steps**

Mr. Nick Diamond presented the Vaccination Action Plan Update on behalf of the LSIF (US). He began his presentation by noting that the vision of the draft Action Plan is to support all member economies in their vaccination efforts. He also highlighted several challenges with implementing vaccination across life course, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes supply chain interruption, vaccine hesitancy and regulation for vaccine approval. While the LSIF has several activities planned for the remainder of 2021, work continues on the Action Plan and the US hopes to endorse it by the end of the year. In addition, Mr. Diamond highlighted that there have also planned several webinars throughout the year as well as policy dialogues to discuss some of the longer term lessons learned of ongoing COVID-19 pandemic with the engagement of relevant stakeholders. He also highlighted that in order to come out with a sustainable Action Plan, all member economies are welcome to provide feedback.

* 1. **Vaccination Programme of Work (VPoW)**

While the endorsement and discussion on HWG 2021 Work Plan continued following the Day One meetings, Mr. Pearson highlighted that certain deliverables in the VPoW have been proposed to be deferred until 2022, so that we can ensure to highlight and align vaccination efforts with current global COVID-19 vaccination efforts. This will include the Vaccination Spotlight Report, which was originally scheduled to be completed last year, but deferred due to the emergence of COVID-19.

Canada intervened and noted its continued support for the endorsement of the Vaccination Action Plan, with reference to the APEC 2020 Leaders Statement, highlighting the importance of equitable access to safe and affordable vaccines, along with countermeasures to safeguard people across the region. Canada noted that it views the Action Plan as an overarching document for both the LSIF and HWG for the next decade, which will help coordinate overall APEC efforts to improve vaccination in the Asia-Pacific region.

US supported the intervention made by Canada and urged all economies to endorse the Action Plan.

1. **PANEL DISCUSSION: COVID-19 VACCINATION – ROLL-OUT AND ADDRESSING VACCINE CONFIDENCE**

In order to provide APEC member economies the opportunity to discuss COVID-19 roll-out and addressing vaccine confidence, the HWG meeting included a dedicated policy discussion on current and future approaches to COVID-19 vaccination. HWG member economies shared their respective experiences with COVID-19 roll-out, the role digital literacy has played in addressing vaccine confidence and how to ensure priority access to vulnerable and at-risk populations. The panel discussion, moderated by Mr. Pearson, included brief presentations from representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office of the Covax Facility at Gavi, and LSIF.

Mr. Pearson began the discussion by noting that COVID-19 has caused unprecedented effects, however, within less than one year after the emergence of the new coronavirus, the first COVID-19 vaccines have been invented, approved and administered to protect the global population. He also noted that the accelerated development of these multiple vaccines is remarkable, as the process typically takes years. He acknowledged the global collaboration and the tireless work of the WHO, Gavi, governments and industry in making this possible. As a final remark, Mr. Pearson highlighted one of the challenges that this global mass immunization campaign will face is “vaccine hesitancy” surrounding these new vaccines. Therefore, it is important to focus on the role digital literacy can play to address issues related to vaccine confidence. It was noted that the majority of economies implement the same vaccination plan which prioritises front liners, the elderly, high-risk group, and all other vulnerable populations.

Ms. Lisa Menning, Team Lead (Acting), Demand and Behavioural Sciences, World Health Organization, as the first panelist to present during this discussion, thanked APEC for the opportunity to present on vaccine confidence, after her previous involvement during SOM3 HWG Meeting 2020. She noted that the WHO has been working with expert and interdisciplinary groups to develop and identify four key factors of vaccination uptake. Ms. Menning noted that the WHO’s work with these groups has enabled them to look at the latest evidence available to develop a simplified model to identify the four main drivers. She also briefly highlighted the global attitudes and acceptance towards COVID-19 vaccine and noted that there has been a gradual increase of people’s acceptance in the recent months. In terms of addressing vaccine hesitancy, she noted that we should first try to understand individuals’ positions or attitudes against vaccination. She also highlighted that every context is different, and therefore it is important to develop tailored strategies that are locally targeted through individuals’ systems to address some of the attitudes towards vaccine hesitancy.

Ms. Aurelia Nguyen, MD Office of the COVAX Facility, provided her remarks via a pre-recorded video message due to the time difference with Geneva. In her remarks, Ms. Nguyen noted how multilateral and regional cooperation is required to improve the current uncoordinated approach, including vaccine distribution, by all member economies during this global health crisis. She also highlighted that the Asia-Pacific region has suffered a loss estimated at USD 1.5 trillion. Additionally, as the pandemic is not resolved, it is predicted that global economic growth will be uneven among member economies in 2021, which highly depends on economy’s response and recovery, along with effective management of the pandemic. As such, the presence of COVAX as a global equitable access aiming to supply vaccines around the world is critical. She noted that APEC member economies have provided strong support to COVAX as a donor or self-financing participant. She emphasized that “no one are safe until everyone is safe”, thus everyone should be provided with equal access for vaccine.

Mr. Nick Diamond, LSIF Vaccines Advisor, was the last panellist for this policy discussion where he provided some reflections on the importance of vaccination specifically in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Diamond encouraged all member economies to take a comprehensive view on how we see and think about vaccine hesitancy He also emphasized the importance of partnerships and collaboration in terms of achieving shared goals around vaccine confidence and hesitancy. He noted that partnerships can take various forms such as Private-Public Partnerships (PPP’s), which can help in developing tools useful for encouraging confidence and immunization across the life course. Finally, he emphasized how partnerships can also be between APEC member economies, where economies can work closely with frontline and healthcare workers to find solutions that might be working to boost vaccine confidence within our respective populations.

* 1. **GUIDED DISCUSSION: COVID -19 VACCINATION ROLL-OUT AND ADDRESSING VACCINE CONFIDENCE**

Following the presentations, Mr. Pearson opened the floor for questions and remarks from member economies.

Indonesia was the first economy to intervene and noted that their COVID-19 vaccination programme rolled out on January 15th, 2021 with the target of 70% of the population to achieve herd immunity. Healthcare workers will be prioritized to receive the COVID-19 vaccination in the first phase, which will be free of charge. Indonesia also highlighted that their vaccination campaign started last December with the government developing a strategic communication plan to educate its population through mass media and online reference documents. They noted that they managed to successfully increase Indonesian confidence towards COVID-19 vaccination. However, Indonesia still faces several challenges including vaccine supply and logistics in terms of vaccine distribution and halal assurances. This will be managed by continuing bilateral and multilateral engagement to obtain vaccines and to supply across Indonesia. Finally, Indonesia emphasized the importance of digital literacy in COVID-19 vaccination programs to prevent misinformation around vaccination, which can help overcome vaccine hesitancy and increase vaccine confidence.

Singapore began their intervention by noting its COVID-19 vaccination programme objectives, which is to protect the Singaporean population and to allow the economy to recover quickly, minimise morbidity and mortality, and reduce strain to healthcare resources. They noted that implementing a comprehensive vaccination plan will enable opening and expedite recovery from the pandemic. As such, their vaccination programme prioritizes high-risk and vulnerable groups, which includes healthcare workers and front liners. As an effort to further support the vaccination programme, Singapore plans to open more vaccination centres. Singapore also noted that COVID-19 vaccination will be given for free. While the vaccine is given voluntarily, the Singaporean Government encourages everyone to take the vaccine. Singapore highlighted that they communicate and spread correct information through various media platform to boost people’s confidence. Singapore also noted that they welcome the sharing of best practices among member economies.

The Russian Federation acknowledged COVID-19 as a global threat and encouraged all to work together to fight the pandemic. Russia highlighted that they have registered three domestically produced vaccines using different biological platforms, including Sputnik V, which is manufactured by Gamaleya and has a 90% efficacy rate. To date, millions of Russian have been vaccinated and their priority when starting their vaccination programme has been front liners and healthcare workers. Russia also noted that they started a wide vaccination campaign using all media platforms to communicate with its population to boost their confidence in vaccination, especially on trusting their own locally produced vaccine. Vaccine uptake will also be free of charge and voluntary. Moving forward, Russia is ready to cooperate with all APEC economies in the efforts to combat COVID-19.

Chile noted in their intervention that they are currently in the second phase of COVID-19 vaccination programme. They noted that they implemented a vaccination programme back in December 2020 in collaboration with the Ministry of Science to gain people’s acceptance on vaccine. Additionally, a steering committee was established to develop a strategy to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. To, Chile also highlighted that 60% of the population are ready to be vaccinated, even though vaccination is voluntary.

As one of the economies that has been badly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in Southeast Asia, Malaysia started the intervention by stating the number of recent cases of COVID-19 in the economy. Malaysia aims to vaccinate approximately 80% of its population whereby the vaccination programme has rolled out starting from February 24th, 2021. Among others, the objectives of the programme have been also highlighted. Malaysia has formed a special committee in preparation for the vaccine roll-out and established The National COVID-19 Immunisation Plan. To ensure the vaccination programme run smoothly, few actions have been taken. These include planning for vaccine deployment, regulatory actions for vaccine registration and rollout and development of an online system for registration of eligible priority groups using “MySejahtera” application. Malaysia highlighted that handling vaccines as a challenge, as it requires series of cold chain handling to be strictly controlled to ensure its safety, efficacy and quality is preserved before it can be administered to the patient. Malaysia noted that a constant and continuous public communication campaign has also been launched through mass and social media, to provide the population with information on eligibility, vaccination sites, timing, vaccine safety and efficacy, along with to boost their confidence with vaccination program. This is to encounter dissemination of fake and misleading messages by the anti-vaccine movements or so called the pro-choice groups who are not only propagated the false news but also falsified the true evidence on the safety and efficacy of vaccines.

New Zealand noted that they have a strategy of elimination of COVID-19, and have sustained this approach to keep the virus out of the economy, which has largely been successful. New Zealand’s focus on elimination has thus informed their vaccine strategy. Vaccine rollout of the first priority group, front line, healthcare workers and those working on the borders, started in February 2021. While they are still in the early stages of vaccine roll-out, the key focus has been on equity in terms of both the design and implementation of the vaccination strategy. Their goal is to reduce systemic inequality and institutional racism. New Zealand also highlighted that they have adopted targeted training, communication and service delivery in terms of COVID-19 vaccination rollout and addressing vaccine confidence.

China highlighted their success in containing the transmission of COVID-19 since April 2020. An locally produced vaccine is now available and they have rolled out their vaccination programme since December 15th, 2020. China noted that they are targeting a vaccination rate of 50% of the population in order to minimize the risk of infection among people. China also highlighted that the demand and supply of COVID-19 vaccination has been their challenge in the implementation of vaccination programme. However, China has committed to ensuring adequate vaccine supply for all targeted populations. Additionally, China joined the COVAX facility to promote the equitable access of COVID-19 vaccines. China also emphasized the important role of digital media in terms of disseminating information.

Thailand’s intervention noted that its COVID-19 vaccination programme which started on February 28th, 2021, has three main objectives which include saving lives, strengthening health systems, and saving the economy. Thailand also noted that the programme will involve the use of technology to improve citizens’ experience, reduce healthcare staffs’ burden, and spread correct and real-time information across the economy.

The Philippines’s economy has also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the reduction of their annual GDP. The Philippines noted that COVID-19 vaccination is important to complement with other existing measures which have already been implemented. The economy’s National Task Force has developed COVID-19 vaccination plan to guide the operationalisation of a vaccination programme, which is scheduled to roll out in February 2021. Currently, the Philippines is identifying the eligible individuals to be vaccinated, as well as preparing their logistics and performing simulation exercises. The Philippines re-emphasized Ms. Aurelia Nguyen’s statement which is “no one are safe until everyone is safe”.

Chinese Taipei stated that they expect to vaccinate 65% of the population to reach herd immunity. Chinese Taipei also noted that they use digital technology to set vaccination appointment, which will depend on the availability of the vaccines. Some of the challenges they face include vaccine supply in the economy and the spreading of false information regarding vaccines. However, Chinese Taipei noted some possible solutions to these challenges, which include maintaining the public confidence in non-pharmaceutical interventions to control the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring the safety and effectiveness of all authorized vaccines.

Japan was the last economy to intervene where they highlighted that their COVID-19 vaccination programme began on February 17th, 2020. Their vaccination campaign currently targets healthcare workers. Additionally, with the free vaccination given regardless of nationality, Japan has implemented continuous campaigns to attract its population to accept the vaccines, in addition to introducing informative systems available for people to access for correct information especially on vaccine’s safety and efficacy. Japan also noted their strong support of the COVAX Facility initiative to ensure the equitable access of vaccines globally.

Mr. Pearson thanked all member economies for their thoughtful and insightful contributions to the discussion. He noted that it is clear that most parts of the world are facing logistical challenges in terms of vaccine supply and distribution. Other than that, Mr. Pearson also noted the important role digital literacy has played among APEC member economies to disseminate factual information on COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination programmes to further improve vaccine confidence, not limited to COVID-19 vaccines.

1. **CLOSING REMARKS**
   1. **Closing Remarks and Plan for Day Two**

As the 2021 HWG Work Plan did not get endorsed, both Co-Chairs proposed that the HWG postpone a final discussion and decision on the 2021 Work Plan to Day Two. The Co-Chairs proposed to come back to this agenda item after the APEC Management Update. Member economies were encouraged to provide suggestions or re-consider the suitable terms to be used in the Work Plan, so that the discussion and endorsement process can be successful during Day Two. In terms of the Philippines’ comment on the HAP2020, Mr. Pearson noted that the APEC Secretariat will work with them moving forward.

Both Mr. Fabian and Mr. Pearson concluded the meeting by thanking participants for their participation during Day One of the HWG meetings.

**DAY TWO**

*Tuesday, March 2nd, 2021*

1. **RECAP OF DAY ONE**
   1. **Summary Remarks by HWG Co-Chairs**

HWG Co-Chair, Mr. Michael Pearson (Canada), and Mr. Fabian Bigar (Malaysia) began the meeting by noting the success of the first session and highlighted the thematic focus on vaccines, which was indicative of not just the current reality we live in, but particularly of the valuable ways the HWG can contribute to health dialogues across the Asia-Pacific. Both Mr. Pearson and Mr. Bigar also provided remarks to thank member economies for their commitment in participating in the Day One of HWG virtual meeting, and highlighted Day Two’s focus on important topics that pre-date the pandemic including Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), mental health, digital health and healthy ageing.

Mr. Fabian Bigar (Malaysia) welcomed everyone back and thanked member economies for joining Day Two of the HWG meetings. He also highlighted that he looked forward to the discussions among member economies, which will continue to demonstrate commitment for a constructive and profitable dialogue on health-related issues in the Asia-Pacific region.

1. **APEC MANAGEMENT UPDATE – 2021**

Mr. Johnny Lin, Program Director, APEC Secretariat, briefly provided an update on the HWG. After SOM1, the HWG will undergo a fora assessment this year, which will assess the HWG’s meeting performance, projects completed, along with the input received through a qualitative survey that was circulated to member economies. As such, Mr. Lin encouraged all member economies to submit the qualitative survey as soon as possible. He also noted that the decision to renew the HWG mandate for another four years will be announced during SOM3.

Mr. Lin took the opportunity to acknowledge and introduce the new HWG Vice Chair (Thailand), Dr. Pongsadhorn Pokpermdee, for the term 2021 to 2022. He also stated that the next Chair/Co-Chair nomination will be circulated among economies shortly after the meetings and the nomination will be approved during SOM3.

Mr. Lin also provided updates and timelines for Project 1 and Project 2 Session 2021. The expected priorities for the projects in 2021 include COVID-19 recovery and response, implementation of Putrajaya Vision 2040, and free trade flow of essential goods. As for Project Session 1, 14 Concept Notes (CNs) have been received from economies, which is typically the average number received for every session, with most the CNs is related to the expected priorities.

1. **HWG WORK PLAN 2021 DISCUSSION**

Mr. Pearson then turned to the next agenda item, which was a final discussion on the Draft 2021 HWG Work Plan.

As the HAP2020 expired, HWG Co-Chairs agreed to move forward with the comments made by the Philippines, regarding the revision of the Concept Note protocols, so that the Work Plan reflects the North Star Document.

In terms of the proposed language in the introductory paragraph of the Work Plan, the Co-Chairs highlighted that they recognize that not all member economies use the same language. As such, they have reviewed and proposed the use of WHO accepted terminology which is “vulnerable”. The alternative language would read as follows; “*…..disproportionate impact of the crisis on the poor, women, children, indigenous peoples and others in vulnerable and at-risk situations.*”

Canada, New Zealand, the US, Australia, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, China, and Malaysia all indicated their support for this proposed alternative language as it provides inclusivity and a broader point of view.

As there were no objections and further comments, the 2021 HWG Work Plan was deemed officially endorsed by the HWG.

1. **STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS: NEXT STEPS ON NORTH STAR DOCUMENT** 
   1. **Healthy-Asia Pacific (HAP) 2020 Review Update**

Mr. Paolo Kraushaar provided the updates on the HAP2020 Report by providing member economies with a refresher of the HAP2020 background. As endorsed in Beijing in 2014, the HAP 2020 Report emerged from the HAP2020 Initiative, developed due to the broad framework of the HWG. Mr. Kraushaar also noted that specific indicators were set to provide member economies with ideas on relevant activities consisting of six target areas. Recognizing the diversity of APEC member economies, each economy needs to select only one target area.

Currently, 14 member economies have provided data for the report and the report will be circulated for verification in a few weeks time. As for other interested economies, members have until June 30th, 2021 to submit their data. The final compiled report will be processed for endorsement during SOM3.

Mr. Kraushaar emphasized that the report is important as it will provide guidance for the North Star Document.

* 1. **Next Steps on the North Star Document**

Mr. Pearson then turned to the North Star Document, which was discussed and aimed to be endorsed last year.

With the endorsement of the Putrajaya Vision 2040 during the 27th APEC Economic Leaders’ Meeting in November 2020, Mr. Pearson noted that we should continue to set the path forward for coordinated health efforts between the HWG and the LSIF for the next decade. While the North Star Document would be in essence replacing the HAP2020, the HAP2020 review does not need to be completed in order to move forward with the North Star.

While the HAP2020 was a comprehensive roadmap and initiative with specific targets and indicators, the North Star Document is higher level document, similar to the Putrajaya Vision 2040, and is intended to provide economies with enough flexibility to achieve its goals, while also recognizing the diversity of APEC economies.

As such, in terms of next steps, the HWG Co-Chairs proposed to resend the latest version of the North Star for comments from all member economies, and to work with the LSIF in order to have joint endorsement of the document by SOM3.

The proposed path forward was supported by Canada, Thailand and the USA, and assumed to be agreed by all member economies as no further comments were made.

1. **DISCUSSION OF THE APEC ROADMAP FOR MENTAL HEALTH**

Following the endorsement of the WHO Mental Health Action Plan in 2013, members of the HWG and LSIF endorsed the APEC Roadmap to Promote Mental Wellness in a Healthy Asia Pacific, which expired in 2020. AHWG sub-working group was also created to establish the HWG’s vision for mental health post 2020, in collaboration with the Digital Hub.

Earlier this year, the sub-working group agreed to a proposal to have the Digital Hub, as the coordinating centre for APEC’s work in mental health, develop a proposal outlining a process for the development and endorsement of a post-2020 Roadmap for Mental Health.

The sub-working group on mental health post-2020 had the opportunity to review and endorse this proposal shortly before the SOM1 meeting.

* 1. **Presentation on the Process for 2021**

Dr. Jill Murphy, Executive Director of APEC Digital Hub for Mental Health, began the presentation by updating the substantive progress of APEC Digital Hub under the Roadmap 2014-2020. Among others, there is partnership and collaboration with other multilateral platform such as the WHO, to conduct surveys within the APEC region.

Dr. Murphy noted that COVID-19 has caused effects, including mental health, and these unprecedented effects will continue to emerge. COVID-19 pandemic has also created existing gaps in healthcare in the Asia Pacific region and it was emphasized that there is a need for investment in mental health in the APEC region, which is more urgent than ever.

Dr. Jill also spoke briefly on the proposed process for post 2020 Roadmap and outlined the timeline for the development of the Roadmap starting from February to August 2021, which will then tabled for endorsement during SOM3. Dr. Murphy also noted that substantial progress has been made under the Roadmap and that she hopes the Digital Hub can continue to develop new partnerships to advance mental health in the Asia-Pacific region.

* 1. **Discussion and Endorsement of Process**

Canada intervened and thanked Dr. Jill for leading the effort on the APEC Digital Hub for Mental Health. As COVID-19 has created gaps in mental health, Canada supports the proposed development process timeline for 2021 and looks forward to collaboration.

Malaysia also took the opportunity to appreciate the effort on the APEC Digital Hub for Mental Health, which started since 2016. Malaysia also supports the proposed development process timeline for 2021.

As there were no further comments from member economies, the proposed process for the development process of a post 2020 Roadmap was deemed as officially endorsed by the HWG.

1. **NUTRITION**

As agreed during SOM1 2020, the HWG is working to develop a compilation document of best practices to improve childhood nutrition, through addressing malnutrition, including obesity, across the Asia-Pacific region, and support the region’s capacity to share knowledge and experience in addressing this important issue.

* 1. **Presentation and Update**

Ms. Maria Paz Grandon began her presentation by sharing the association of childhood obesity and overweight with a numbers of factors, namely transformations of food systems, life style, and food patterns. She also shared the numbers of population affected by the problem.

The project started on September 2019 and is expected to be completed by August this year. Among others, the project will create a platform to exchange best practices and experiences among economies, as well as its economic consequences. Several activities have already been completed including a workshop, nutrition sub-working group, and the development of a document of practices in public policies for childhood obesity.

She noted that input of best practices has been obtained from Canada, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Singapore, USA, Thailand, and the Philippines.

The next step of this project will be the publication of the final report on the best practices on childhood obesity expected to be completed in August 2021, for endorsement during SOM3.

1. **HEALTHY AGEING AND DEMENTIA** 
   1. **Presentation on Healthy Ageing Report and Update**

Ms. Daniela Guzman began her presentation by providing the goal of Chile’s self-funded project, which is to develop a document reporting systematized good practices on Healthy Aging, and to propose an Aging Agenda to be considered within the HWG. The project began pursuant to a policy dialogue convened in August 2019, which involved 150 representatives from APEC economies.

Ms. Guzman presented the structure of the report, and noted that Chile received inputs from Chinese Taipei, Chile, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Peru, the Philippines, and Thailand. She encouraged other economies to send input before April 2021.

The final report document of good practices will be presented during SOM3.

* 1. **Endorsement of the Dementia Spotlight Report**

Mr. Fabian then turned to the endorsement of Dementia Spotlight Report.

As agreed during HLM9, the HWG developed a ‘Dementia Spotlight Report’ to facilitate the sharing of successful policies and programs and encourage regional collaboration. HLM9 also reaffirmed the need to increase funding for dementia research, to share knowledge and best practices in the region, and to incorporate care provider experiences when developing dementia policies.

Following discussions at HLM9, APEC HWG member economies submitted a project or initiative that their respective economy has undertaken with regards to dementia and healthy ageing. Mr. Fabian thanked all of member economies that submitted their Dementia policies and programs.

As there were no comments from member economies, the Dementia Spotlight Report was deemed as officially endorsed by HWG.

1. **DIGITAL HEALTH**

Mr. Pearson continued with another important item in the HWG, as digital health has become an ongoing interest among APEC members.

* 1. **Next Steps for the** **Sub-Working Group**

Dr. Li-Ling Liu from Chinese Taipei briefly presented on the progress of the Digital Health Sub-Working Group (DHSWG). The first meeting was held virtually on July 20th, 2020 where the strategic plan was endorsed. The next meeting will be in April or May 2021 and a project will be proposed on June 2021.

Another major deliverable of the DHSWG is the APEC Policy Dialogue on November 2020, which was conducted in a hybrid manner. 60 participants from seven economies were involved in the policy dialogue. Among others, the discussion focussed on digital health policies for COVID-19 prevention and promotion of digital health in a post COVID-19 pandemic world. In terms of next steps, Chinese Taipei will work on developing a concept note for an APEC Digital Health Alliance, will organize a HWG Policy Dialogue on Digital Health this year, and will also lead the development of the Digital Health Report which member economies will have the opportunity to input.

1. **REGIONAL PANEL UPDATES: ADDRESSING NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE** 
   1. **Regional Update on Non-Communicable Diseases Trends**

Day Two of the HWG meeting also included a dedicated discussion that provided an opportunity for member economies to share their experiences and perspectives in addressing Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs), while also addressing COVID-19, and how the needs of at-risk and vulnerable populations have been addressed. The panel discussion was supported by representatives from the WHO, Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), as well as International Agency for Research on Cancer, who provided brief presentations on NCDS in the regions

Before the pandemic, NCDs presented challenges to our economies, as seven of the ten leading causes of deaths in 2019. However, prevention and treatment services for NCDs have been increasingly disrupted as the implementation of public health measures to mitigate community transmission of the virus continues to affect access and delivery of key health services and programs. Furthermore, NCDs including cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and cancer has also shown to put individuals at increased risk of complications related to COVID-19.

Dr. Angela Pratt, Director, Regional Director’s Office & Communications and External Relations / Acting Director, Division of Healthy Environments and Populations, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific, began the discussion by providing an update of the status of risk factors for NCDs in the region. The alarmingly high risk factors including obesity, lack of physical activities, smoking, and alcohol consumption have contributed to the increase of NCDs cases. Dr. Pratt noted that data from a study conducted shows that high risk prevalence of NCDs in the region are due to all the risk factors mentioned. She emphasized that addressing NCDs is not just focus on prevention, but it is also requires an improvement in the overall healthcare system. She also noted that NCDs are not just a problem for lower income economies, but also includes high income economies. Additionally, in terms of at-risk and vulnerable populations, Dr. Pratt noted that we need to address the underlying inequalities that has made some sections of the population more susceptible to NCDs.

Dr. Anselm Hennis, Director, Non-Communicable Diseases and Mental Health, Pan-American Health Organization, started his presentation by highlighting the economic disparities in the region of the Americas. He noted that the stark income gaps are rooted in the social determinants of health. Dr. Hennis stated that 8 out of 10 people die due to NCDs. He also noted that the principle cause of NCD related deaths is cardiovascular disease followed by cancer. Additionally, obesity and physical inactivity are the common risk factors in the region. In this regard, Dr. Hennis emphasized the need for urgent and comprehensive policies to reduce the use of tobacco and obesity, which would result in clear returns on investments if the comprehensive interventions address some of the risk factors that cause NCDs. Dr. Hennis also noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has further increased the risk factors of NCDs among people living with underlying conditions who are at higher risk of severe COVID-19 disease and related mortality.

Dr. Isabelle Soerjomataram, Deputy Head, Section of Cancer Surveillance, International Agency for Research on Cancer, as the last panelist, began the presentation touching on the estimation of death by age and cause, including cancer and cardiovascular disease (CVD). She noted that cancer has increasingly become more important in the APEC region with the major cancers (i.e. lung and breast cancer) often appearing similar across APEC economies. She highlighted that one of the Sustainable Development Goals, Goal #3, which is to reduce premature mortality from NCDs through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being, will be a challenge for all APEC economies. While a lot of the research and policy focus has been on CVD, Dr. Soerjomataram noted that strategies to tackle cancer are needed otherwise it will become a bigger problem in the future. Dr. Soerjomataram concluded her presentation by noting that COVID-19 has caused direct and indirect impacts on health, including cancer among other NCDs.

1. **GUIDED DISCUSSION: ADDRESSING NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE**

Following the presentations, Mr. Fabian opened the floor for questions and remarks from member economies.

Indonesia’s intervention noted that the top three leading NCDs in their economy are stroke, heart disease and diabetes. As there is an alarming increase in the number of cases, Indonesia has conducted prevention measures in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. During the pandemic, all health services to address NCDs have continued, which is further enhanced with the use of digital platforms. Indonesia agreed that NCDs need to be addressed as a priority and welcome collaboration and cooperation with APEC economies in sharing best practices.

Singapore acknowledged that NCDs continue to be the leading cause of death and disability globally, including in Singapore. As such, given the rapidly aging population, Singapore continues to recognize the need for urgent multisectoral action at the national, regional and international level to address the rise of NCD cases. Currently, Singapore has conducted a multipronged approach to encounter NCDs, which provides a supportive environment for a healthy lifestyle. Singapore continues to integrate an NCD approach through their public health care system to ensure that previous gains in health promotion are sustained. Additionally, a life course approach is also in place to maximise the health of individuals as they age. In terms of addressing the needs of at-risk and vulnerable populations, Singapore noted that their health programs are generally inclusive and efforts are made to collaborate with community partners to ensure that vulnerable populations have access to them. Singapore also noted that they look forward to working together with other economies.

Chile noted that they have also been affected by NCDs and have been introducing several measures to address NCDs in the population. However, despite great efforts, there have been some interruptions of access to services for NCDs. Chile recognized that mental health has been an important issue within the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted a program they have created called ‘Healthy Minds’, which facilitates the access to improve people’s minds and psychological wellbeing.

Japan noted that they have enhanced the countermeasures for NCDs during COVID-19, specifically for the prevention and management of cases. Japan has also introduced a COVID-19 mental health support programme, which provides consultation. In the future, this support programme will be expanded to people with suicidal risk. Japan also took the opportunity to invite APEC economies to join a summit in Japan which will be held this year, where one of the agenda items will focus on the literacy of NCDs.

Canada intervened by stating that the prevalence of physical inactivity and other factors that put some of our populations more at risk for developing chronic diseases, has increased due to the current restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Canada recognized the impacts of the pandemic especially on mental health services as the demand for mental health is increasing. As such, Canada has also provided alternatives using virtual care and mental health tools to support Canadians. Therefore, even in the middle of a global infectious disease outbreak, Canada noted that addressing NCDs and their risk factors should be a priority. Canada echoed the panelist from the WHO and emphasized the importance of addressing NCDs for all groups in society. Canada also encouraged all member APEC economies to support continued domestic and international efforts to address NCDs, such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, mental health, among others.

China noted that the Government of China has always attached great importance to NCDs and will always put the best measures in prevention and control of NCDs. China has recently released a report on nutrition and NCDs and also issued a Work Plan for a three year period to address NCDs. The Work Plan will serve as a reference to strengthen the decision making process and assessment on NCDs surveillance system. Additionally, China noted that a public health package is given free of charge to NCD patients, as well as providing medical insurance coverage to all patients. China concluded that the Government will continue to promote inclusive strategies with the participation of the people.

Thailand stated that NCDs has caused a huge burden on the healthcare system and economy, and has been the major cause of death in 2016. To address this, Thailand has enhanced the use of information and communications technology (ICT), along with other measures in place. For example, Thailand launched a platform for online consultation and medication prescription that is accessible to all. Thailand also focusses on health promotion and environmental management to protect its population. Thailand noted that it equips its population with health literacy on how to protect themselves from COVID-19 and other diseases. Thailand also noted that addressing NCDs is not only by the Government but also requires the involvement of society, which all efforts need to be doubled during the pandemic.

In Malaysia, NCDs are the leading cause of death and morbidity among adults in and have resulted in heavy emotional, as well as financial burden. Malaysia noted that the increasing medical costs to treat patients with NCDs are of serious concern. Along with that, COVID-19 pandemic has brought on new challenges in the prevention and control of NCDs in Malaysia and globally. Therefore, Malaysia is committed to emphasize preventive measures, at the same time increasing efforts for early detection and quality management of NCDs in primary and tertiary care facilities. On the other hand, COVID-19 pandemic and its response pose a challenge to mental and neurological health and social wellbeing. As such, Malaysia is committed to ensure Malaysians continue to have access to mental health and psychosocial support services, and make them available in the community to protect and promote the mental and neurological health of the population. Malaysia is also aware that responses to COVID-19, including physical distancing and self-isolation, may increase exposure to some NCD risk factors strengthening advocacy and educational activities, with collaborations with other ministries, agencies, professional bodies and NGOs. Malaysia realises that COVID-19 and NCDs cannot be treated as vertical diseases, therefore, Malaysia has strived to consider the full ecosystem in their response to COVID-19 and its interaction with NCDs and poverty.

Chinese Taipei began their intervention by informing the NCDs and cancer situation in the economy. Several measures that are already in place include screening, vaccination programmes, among other intervention measures. Chinese Taipei has also established the National Health Insurance to cover NCDs cases. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese Taipei continues to urge people to adopt a healthy lifestyle by eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly. Chinese Taipei has also provided reference materials for its high risk population. In the future, Chinese Taipei plans to enhance existing measures based on collected national health data.

The Philippines has also been impacted by NCDs, especially with regards to healthcare cost, medical care and other support needs. Several cost-effective measures in place includes banning fast food, junk food, and sweet drinks at school. Moving forward, the Philippines will enhance their measures in terms of control and increase awareness and promotion to the public. The Philippines also noted that they look forward to cooperation among member economies and other international organizations to support NCDs.

Mr. Fabian thanked all member economies for their thoughtful and insightful contributions to the discussion.

1. **CLOSING REMARKS**

Both Mr. Pearson and Mr. Fabian provided closing remarks and noted that APEC economies are not on track to meet the SDG goals for 2030. However, they urged economies to work hard on improving our work as we continue to combat and recover from the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Having said that, the Co-Chairs pleased with the progress made over the two days. They emphasized that the HWG has accomplished several key things during SOM1, which will help ensure a successful SOM3. Both Co-Chairs noted that they look forward to having continued support of the work and the relevant policy discussions that will be held.

In terms of next steps, the Co-Chairs will provide member economies with updates regarding meeting dates and the HLM intersessionally. The Co-Chairs office also committed to re-circulating the draft of the North Star document for discussion and endorsement during SOM3. The Co-Chairs also took the opportunity to thank New Zealand for hosting the virtual HWG and LSIF meetings and for facilitating the conversation.

With that, the 2021 SOM1 HWG Meeting was officially adjourned.