

Aide-Mémoire

Meeting with Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala, WHO Western Pacific Regional Director

Date due to MO:	17 July 2024	Action required by:	N/A
Security level:	IN CONFIDENCE	Health Report number:	H2024044553
To:	Hon Dr Shane Reti, Minister of Health		
Consulted:	Health New Zealand: <input type="checkbox"/>		

Contact for telephone discussion

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Date due: 17 July 2024

To: Hon Dr Shane Reti, Minister of Health

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Details of meeting: Tuesday 23 July 2024
3.15pm – 3.45pm
Minister of Health's Office, 6.6 EW

Purpose of meeting: Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala was recently appointed as the World Health Organization's (WHO) Western Pacific Regional Director. This meeting is an opportunity to congratulate Dr Piukala on his appointment and discuss priorities for health within the Western Pacific region, including in New Zealand. You will be joined by the Director-General of Health and Deputy-Director General of the Public Health Agency.

Comment:

- s 6(a)
- Dr Piukala will be accompanied by Dr Mark Jacobs (Director of Pacific Technical Support and WHO Representative of the South Pacific). Biographies are attached in appendix 1.
- During a University of Auckland seminar on 17 July, Dr Piukala announced that Aupito William Sio (former Minister for Pacific Peoples and Associate Minister of Health) would join WHO. We understand this to be a New Zealand based consultancy on climate change and health, focused on the Pacific.
- Dr Piukala's full programme is attached in appendix 2.
- Please note that Dr Piukala is likely to extend a gift to you. The office may wish to consider reciprocating.
- This aide-mémoire provides information on the relationship between the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office and New Zealand. Talking points are also provided.



Dr Andrew Old
Deputy Director-General
Public Health Agency | Te Pou Hauora Tūmatanui

Meeting with Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala, WHO Western Pacific Regional Director

Context

1. Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala is the newly appointed WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific and the first Pacific Islander to take up this role. He was the Minister for Health in Tonga until taking up office on 1 February 2024, and is a trained surgeon.
2. Dr Piukala is a champion of multisectoral collaboration to tackle noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and the threat posed by climate change. He has been a strong advocate for initiatives on youth health, tobacco control, safe surgery, disaster preparedness and response, emerging infectious diseases and universal health coverage.
3. Dr Piukala has prioritised visiting as many of the 37 countries in the Western Pacific region as possible and will have visited 17 by the conclusion of his current trip. He intends to engage with governments and other stakeholders, learn about critical health issues, as well as exploring areas for increased collaboration. Dr Piukala has visited both Niue and the Cook Islands immediately prior to visiting New Zealand.
4. The Ministry manages New Zealand's annual financial contribution to WHO. Based on an assessed formula, this was \$2,985,211 for 2024. WHO receives additional funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, particularly for health projects in the Pacific.

Background

The WHO Western Pacific Region

5. The WHO Western Pacific Region is one of the most diverse of the six WHO regions, encompassing 37 Member States from North Asia, the Pacific Islands, Australia, and New Zealand, and is home to more than a quarter of the world's population.
6. The Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) has its regional headquarters in Manila, Philippines, with a sub-regional office in Suva, Fiji, focused on the health needs of Pacific Islands. Each WHO region is led by a Regional Director responsible for the programme management, governance, managerial, financial, and staffing requirements of the region.
7. New Zealand is an active Member State in the region, contributing to WPRO governance processes (including recent developments around leadership of the Regional Office). We also work, in tandem with Australia, to ensure that Pacific countries' needs are highlighted where possible, and actively addressed in the setting of regional health policies/programmes.
8. New Zealand's engagement in both Geneva-based WHO and Manila-based WPRO processes in recent years has naturally focused on COVID-19 and reforms to the global health architecture for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. At the same time, we have also maintained a focus on WPRO developments regarding technical health issues of concern to New Zealand and our Pacific neighbours (including NCDs), noting that progress against many regional health challenges was negatively impacted by COVID-19.

Upcoming Western Pacific Regional Committee Meeting

9. The Western Pacific Regional Committee Meeting (RCM) is an important regional component of WHO governance. At the RCM, Member States of the Western Pacific Region make collective decisions on issues related to regional WHO programmes, as well as matters relating to WHO's wider governance and management.
10. New Zealand plays an active role by monitoring WHO's progress in the region, sharing our experiences, as well as learning from others. Our interventions seek to advance New Zealand's policy priorities, as well as those of Pacific Island Countries.
11. The 75th RCM will take place from 21-25 October 2024, in Manila, Philippines. It will be convened by Dr Piukala in his newly appointed Regional Director role. Ministerial attendance at this meeting would signal strong support for the new Regional Director s 6(a)
12. The Ministry of Health (the Ministry) understands that WHO is expecting a high level of ministerial attendance at the RCM this year including from the Pacific and Southeast Asian Countries (including Cambodia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei).
13. The provisional agenda for the upcoming RCM, includes:
 - a. regional action framework on digital health
 - b. health financing for universal health coverage and sustainable development
 - c. progress reports on health security, non-communicable diseases and ageing, climate change and health, and advancing the "For the Future" vision to make the Western Pacific the world's safest and healthiest region.
 - d. WPRO programme budget for 2026-2027.

Western Pacific Regional Director's vision statement for the region

14. The Regional Director's vision document "Weaving Health for Families, Communities and Societies of the Western Pacific Region: Working together to improve health and save lives" and its implementation plan will be presented for endorsement at the 75th Western Pacific Regional Committee Meeting in October 2024.
15. The vision document is closely linked to the WHO's new 14th General Programme of Work (GPW14). The priority areas identified for the next five years for WHO, Member States, and all stakeholders and partners include:
 - a. transformative primary care
 - b. climate-ready and responsive health systems
 - c. resilient communities and societies.
16. The document further outlines the organisational change needed to achieve these priorities by:
 - a. providing nimble support to teams in the Western Pacific Regional Offices
 - b. country offices being equipped with skills for adaptation and innovation
 - c. effective communications.
17. Sir Collin Tukuitonga has been involved in drafting this strategy document in his capacity as the chair of a transition team established to assist the newly appointed Western

Pacific Regional Director. The Ministry has been involved in the Member State consultations and are generally comfortable with this document. s 6(a)

Topics of mutual interest

18. The following New Zealand health priorities and topics are likely to be of high interest to Dr Piukala and the WHO Western Pacific office.

Government Policy Statement on Health

19. The New Zealand Government has released New Zealand's first Government Policy Statement (GPS) on Health 2024-2027, outlining what the Government expects the health system to deliver and achieve, and how success will be measured, monitored, and reported.
20. The GPS outlines five priorities for the New Zealand health system and the Government's expectations for each of these areas:
 - a. access - ensuring that every person regardless of where they live in New Zealand, has equitable access to the health care services they need
 - b. timeliness – making sure all New Zealanders can access these services in a prompt and efficient way
 - c. quality – ensuring New Zealand's health care and services are safe, easy to navigate, understandable and welcoming to users, and are continuously improving
 - d. workforce – having a skilled and culturally capable workforce who are accessible, responsive, and supported to deliver safe and effective health care
 - e. infrastructure – ensuring the health system is resilient and has the digital and physical infrastructure it needs to meet people's needs now and in the future.
21. The GPS also outlines the Minister for Mental Health's priorities for mental health, addiction and suicide prevention. These align strongly with the overall health system priorities.

Noncommunicable Diseases

22. The GPS highlights the need to prevent and reduce the impact of five non-communicable diseases: cancer, diabetes, respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease and poor mental health. Together, these account for about 80% of deaths from non-communicable diseases in New Zealand.
23. To better prevent these non-communicable diseases, the health system needs to address 5 modifiable risk factors: alcohol, tobacco, poor nutrition, physical inactivity and adverse social and environmental factors.

Measles

24. There are three phases of response when a case is detected in New Zealand: prepare (pre-response), stamp it out, and focused control.

25. New Zealand's public health response to measles has been tested to good effect since the beginning of 2023, with seven instances in New Zealand where measles has been detected requiring varying degrees of response.
26. New Zealand has been verified by the WHO for eliminating endemic measles in 2017 and retains this status, but we still have a high risk of imported cases.
27. Dr Piukala nominated two WHO Western Pacific Regional staff members (Dr Chung-won Lee and Dr Wang Xiaojun) to be involved in the Independent New Zealand epidemic readiness review. Both colleagues conducted a thorough and useful review of New Zealand's measles readiness, including providing tangible recommendations and next steps.

Avian Influenza

28. High Pathogenicity Avian Influenza (HPAI) viruses cause severe illness and death in wild birds and poultry.
29. The current global animal outbreak of influenza A (H5N1) virus is causing concern as it exhibits a high level of transmissibility and severity, and continues to evolve and infect new types of bird and mammal hosts. This strain also transmits between mammals, indicating a degree of adaptation to mammalian physiology.
30. Of particular concern are outbreaks among dairy cattle in the United States, with subsequent transmission to multiple humans working with dairy herds.

Climate change and health

31. The Ministry is working towards publishing our first Health National Adaptation Plan, which will set the strategic direction and priority actions for the health sector to prepare for the effects of climate change. This plan will:
 - a. have a population health approach to building resilience and a determinants of health focus that has health, equity, and climate change mitigation co-benefits rather than adaptation action alone
 - b. have a strong local focus by assisting local governance of climate adaptation through locally led plans
 - c. build on our research and evidence base, this is likely to include health-specific risk assessments, reflecting the strong need for increased understanding of New Zealand's current climate-related vulnerability and adaptive capacity to inform more detailed solutions for future.
32. We strongly support health-in-all-policies approaches and health officials frequently work with other agencies on issues such as transport, resource management, energy, and housing.
33. The Health National Adaptation Plan will have a strong focus on "triple win" interventions – actions that have benefits for climate mitigation, climate adaptation, and health co-benefits as outlined in the executive board paper.

Climate change and health in Small Island Developing States (SIDs)

34. New Zealand is committed to supporting Pacific Island Countries to take a comprehensive approach to addressing climate change. New Zealand has significantly stepped-up assistance to the region to slow the change and cushion the impacts of climate change.
35. New Zealand, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is providing NZD 1.3 billion in grant-based climate finance over 2022 and 2025. Of this, 50% will support Pacific Island countries and at least 50% will target adaptation initiatives.
36. Published in 2022, New Zealand's Climate Finance Strategy - Tuia te Waka a Kiwa - guides New Zealand's delivery of its climate finance to developing countries, in particular in our own Pacific region.
37. The strategy encourages us to build enduring partnerships with research institutions in the Pacific and beyond and supports the transfer of knowledge, data, and indigenous practices and techniques.

Talking points

Introductory

- Congratulations on your election as the first Pacific Regional Director for the Western Pacific Region.
- Thank you for taking the time to visit New Zealand in what I understand has been an extensive travel schedule for you since you started in the role.

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Appendix 1 Delegation Biographies

Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala, WHO Western Pacific Regional Director



Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala is the WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific and the first Pacific islander to take up this role. He was nominated for this position by the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific in October 2023, appointed by the WHO Executive Board in January 2024 and took office on 1 February 2024.

Dr Piukala is a politician, public health leader and surgeon who brings to the role nearly 30 years of experience working in Tonga and across the Pacific. He is a champion of multisectoral collaboration to tackle noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and the threat to health posed by climate change

He has led initiatives to achieve universal health coverage and address emerging infectious diseases. He has been a strong advocate for initiatives on youth health, tobacco control, safe surgery, and disaster preparedness and response.

Prior to his election as WHO Regional Director, Dr Piukala was a Member of Parliament and Minister of Health of the Kingdom of Tonga. He also served as Vice-Chair of the WHO Regional Committee for the Western Pacific (October 2022 to October 2023), and chaired the Pacific Health Ministers meeting hosted by Tonga in September 2023. From 2019 to 2022 he served a member of the WHO Executive Board, and he was a Commissioner for WHO's Independent High-Level Commission on NCDs from 2018 to 2020.

Previously, Dr Piukala was Medical Superintendent of the main referral hospital in Tonga, and worked as a Senior Medical Officer and General Surgeon in Tonga and other Pacific islands including Fiji, Nauru, Niue and Tuvalu.

Dr Piukala holds a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery (1995), Postgraduate Diploma in Surgery (2005) and Master of Medicine in Surgery (2009) from Fiji School of Medicine / University of the South Pacific.

Dr Mark Jacobs, Director of Pacific Technical Support and WHO Representative to the South Pacific



Dr Mark Jacobs is the Director of Pacific Technical Support and WHO Representative to the South Pacific. He was appointed in this position in August 2021. Prior to this, he has held a series of senior public health leadership roles.

Dr Jacobs was previously the WHO Representative to Lao People's Democratic Republic from November 2018 to August 2021. From May to October 2018, Dr Jacobs was Acting Director of Programme Management for WHO in the Western Pacific Region. He was also previously the Director of Communicable Diseases in the Region for 5 years.

Before joining WHO, he was New Zealand's Director of Public Health for 9 years and managed the Public Health Programme at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community for 3 years. He also spent several years in Director of Public Health roles for state health authorities in Australia.

Dr Jacobs' interests include developing healthy public policy, strengthening disease surveillance, strengthening all hazards emergency preparedness, and working across sectors to improve health. He holds a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery, a Graduate Diploma in Health Services Management and a Master of Public Health.

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Appendix 2

Programme for Dr Piukala's visit to New Zealand

Please note that WHO requested an official visit to Wellington between 22-24 July. The Ministry's Global Health Group has coordinated this programme.

In addition, Dr Piukala has an unofficial programme in Auckland before coming to Wellington. We understand that this is mainly due to flight scheduling. The Auckland programme has been coordinated by WHO staff and the individuals and organizations that have directly sought meetings with the Regional Director. The Auckland programme is included for reference given this includes a number of Pacific health stakeholders.

Dr Piukala's official Wellington programme

Sunday 21 st July 2024	
NZT	
2:10pm	Western Pacific Regional Director and accompanying delegate arrival in Wellington from Auckland (Flight NZ 433)
Monday 22 nd July 2024	
NZT	
11:00 – 1:00pm	Ministry of Health mihi whakatau and welcome for Dr Piukala
2:00 – 3:00pm	Pacific Health Service Hutt Valley (PHSHV) site visit Location: 1 Hewer Crescent, Naenae, Lower Hutt NB: Focused on PHSHV's innovative models of transformative primary care, and nursing led services.
Evening	Dinner with senior officials
Tuesday 23 rd July 2024	
NZT	
9:00 – 10:30	Meeting with Senior Officials from the Institute of Environmental Science Research at Ministry of Health (supported by ISK in the PHA) NB: Focused on communicable diseases and surveillance and ESR functions in the Pacific.
12:00-1:00pm	Ministry of Health in person seminar – Dr Piukala – vision for the Western Pacific Region
3:15 – 3:45pm	Meeting between Western Pacific Regional Director, Dr Saia Ma'u Piukala and Minister of Health, Hon Dr Shane Reti Location: Minister of Health's Office, Room 6.6EW Attendees: Director General of Health, Deputy Director General, PHA and Group Manager Global Health
Wednesday 24 th July 2024	

NZT	
9:00-11:00am	Ngāti Toa's Primary Health Organisation - Ora Toa site visit NB: Focused on innovative models of service design and examples of community-led solutions
11:00 – 12:00pm	Roundtable discussion with senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
2:00 – 4:00pm	Pharmac visit NB: General overview of Pharmac models
Thursday 25th July 2024	
NZT	
06:05am	Western Pacific Regional Director and accompanying delegation depart Wellington to Sydney (Flight QF 162)

Dr Piukala's unofficial Auckland programme

Tuesday 16th July 2024	
NZT	
5:35pm	Western Pacific Regional Director and accompanying delegate arrival in Auckland International Airport
Wednesday 17th July 2024	
NZT	
11:00 -12:30pm	University of Auckland – Te Poutoko Ora A Kiwa – Centre for Pacific and Global Health seminar with Dr Piukala Host: Sir Collin Tukuitonga and Sir Ashley Bloomfield Runsheets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and Introduction; Sir Collin Tukuitonga • Keynote Address, RD (Vision and Priorities) • Reflections and final sentiments; Sir Ashley Bloomfield • Benediction NB: Ministry of Health officials (including Deputy Director General, PHA will be in attendance at this event)
12:30-2:30pm	University of Auckland campus tour
Thursday 18th July 2024	
NZT	
10:00 – 12:30pm	Meeting with Professor Dr Ed Gane, Hepatologist and Surgical Team Location: New Zealand Liver Transplant Unit, Auckland City Hospital
2:00 – 5:00pm	Meeting with the Pasifika Medical Association (PMA)

	PMA overview: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional activities - Domestic activities - Q&A
Friday 19th July 2024	
NZT	
10:00am	Travel to Hamilton
12:00pm	Powhiri and welcome at the University of Waikato, School of Health NB: Focused on pacific research overview and priorities and including a campus tour.
2:10pm	Pasifika Health Provider visit – K’aute Village
3:30pm	Surgeons on Clarence visit
6:00pm	Travel back to Auckland from Hamilton
Saturday 20th July 2024	
NZT	
12:00 – 3:00pm	Pasifika Community Leaders engagement Location: Nasaleti Hall, Tokaikolo Church Mangere NB: Samoan, Cook Islands and PMA leaders will be present

Appendix 3

WHO Governance

WHO's 14th General Programme of Work

1. The 77th World Health Assembly in May 2024 saw Member States agree the WHO's new 14th General Programme of Work (GPW14). This is the key document that sets the strategic direction of planning, prioritization, monitoring and evaluation of WHO's work for 2025-2028.
2. The strategy is a co-creation of all Member States and partners facilitated by the WHO Secretariat that will accelerate progress in health and well-being for everyone, everywhere. By 2028 through the GPW14, WHO will have realised further major health gains: the combined efforts of WHO together with Member States and partners across the wide domain of health will have saved 40 million lives.
3. The GPW14 is structured around three pillars of promoting, providing and protecting health, under which WHO's work will be organised. This is the first General Programme of Work that recognises gender as a social determinant of health and has explicit targets relating to removing barriers to achieve gender equity.
4. The Ministry of Health assesses GPW14 to provide a sound framework for WHO's work in the coming years, including in relation to priorities for our region.

WHO Investment Round

5. To deliver on the WHO's 14th General Programme of Work, WHO needs to be more predictable and sustainably financed. WHO's new investment case entitled "All for Health, Health for All," was launched at the 77th World Health Assembly in May.
6. The Investment Round is designed to secure longer-term and more flexible voluntary contributions than the current model and is regarded by WHO and many Member States as a key complement to the increase in Assessed Contributions agreed at the Assembly last year.
7. New Zealand is supportive of the Investment Round initiative as part of the wider sustainable financing work that WHO and Member States have been undertaking over the last three years, however, we have not signalled an intention to contribute at this stage.