A Conceptual Strategy for Stengthening eSurveillance in the African Region

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Objective

We report on the development of the African Surveillance Informatics Governing Board (ASIGB) as a conceptual strategy for strengthening eSurveillance in the African Region.

Introduction

In response to major epidemic and pandemic outbreaks, WHO-AFRO and its Member States have adopted the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) strategy to address International Health Regulations (2005) as well as individual Member State's national disease control objectives. Significant progress has been made scaling-up capacity for disease surveillance and response using the IDSR guidelines, including implementation of IHR, the WHO African Region has experienced many challenges in designing, developing and implementing electronic surveillance systems.

Over the past decade or more, many local and international stakeholders have independently pursued solutions for electronic surveillance and reporting in African countries. This has resulted in multiple systems of varying effectiveness and minimum interoperability due, in part, to limited agreement among stakeholders on data collecting and reporting standards. This complicated situation prevents most African countries from reaping the full benefits of having electronic systems to help detect, report, and respond to endemic, emerging and priority disease threats.

Methods

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lead a developmental process engaging various partner organizations, including the WHO Regional Office for Africa, to conceptualize a strategy for providing region-wide governance for eSurveillance and reporting. The process culminated in a WHO-AFRO convened meeting of representatives from Ministry departments of human and animal health surveillance programs as well as other stakeholders and technical partners invested in eSurveillance and reporting systems [1]. The three day meeting achieved participant consensus on a strategy to provide a governance forum for leadership, oversight, and strategic guidance for eSurveillance implementation

Results

The conceptual strategy proposes to strengthen national capacity for electronic disease surveillance and reporting in African countries, as defined by the Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) and International Health Regulations (2005) frameworks, with the goal of ensuring the development of eSurveillance is well coordinated, that lessons learned and best practices are shared, and that African countries achieve sufficient capacity to protect against and respond to endemic and emerging diseases, natural and man-made events and conditions, bioterror attacks, and potential pandemics. Key to the success of this effort will be leveraging WHO-AFRO's mandate and relationships with African Ministries of Health and Agriculture in order to build a comprehensive African strategy that promotes country ownership, leadership, and sustainability. Initial efforts will focus on setting guidelines for electronic surveillance standards and interoperability issues. The ASIGB could also provide a forum for Member States to address policy, infrastructure, workforce, and resource needs that directly impact strengthening surveillance and reporting capacity. Under the direction of the ASIBG, this proposal suggests establishing a Surveillance Informatics Technical Advisory Group (SITAG). WHO-AFRO would provide the leadership and convening authority to establish the ASIGB and SITAG due to its presence in all the 47 countries of the region, its convening core functions that enable the organization to support the Organization of the Regional Committee during which policies decisions on health matters of concerns in the region are made, its knowledge of the situation of IHR core capacities in the region

Conclusions

WHO-AFRO's leadership of this proposed strategy aligns with their core function for setting norms and standards for public health. Members of the ASIGB can jointly develop strategies, guidelines, and governance mechanisms for a range of technical, legal, ethical, and confidentiality issues. Implementing and sustaining the ASIGB and SITAG will require strong support and involvement from various key stakeholder to encourage country-level commitment of investments in eSurveillance to the health benefit of all African nations.

Keywords

References

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