



The Regional Public Health Laboratory Network in Asia and the Pacific (RPHL Network)

TERMS OF COLLABORATION

1. Preamble

- 1) The Regional Public Health Laboratory Network (RPHL Network) is a voluntary collaboration of national public health laboratories across the Asia-Pacific region. Established in 2019 under an agreed Terms of Collaboration (TOC), the Network serves as a platform for health security cooperation and capacity-building, bringing together laboratory leaders and professionals to strengthen national public health laboratories for preparedness, prevention, and the timely detection of emerging infectious diseases and other public health threats. Through shared knowledge, coordinated action, and collective problem-solving, the Network facilitates timely information sharing, advances key technical priorities, and leverages regional expertise and resources to create more responsive laboratory systems across the region. It fosters alignment of national laboratory system development with global and regional strategic frameworks, complements other laboratory networks and platforms, and promotes multilateral cooperation that recognizes and builds on individual capacities to enhance regional capability.
- 2) As of March 2026, the RPHL Network includes the following members: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam. Thailand, through its Department of Medical Sciences (DMSc), serves as the Network's permanent chair and hosts the Secretariat Office.
- 3) The Terms of Collaboration will replace the previous Terms of Collaboration, endorsed after 2019 under one of the GHS Action Package, in providing the framework for the governance of the Network, guiding members in their engagement and participation.

2. Vision

- 4) A responsive and resilient public health laboratory network that strengthens laboratory systems to advance preparedness, prevention, timely detection, and health outcome improvement across the Asia-Pacific region.

3. Mission

- 5) To achieve its vision, the RPHL Network facilitates multi-sectoral collaboration and coordination to support members in strengthening national laboratory and diagnostic systems for the timely detection of potential outbreaks and the protection of public health. The Network aims to:
 - 3.1. Foster active engagement of members, experts, and partners.
 - 3.2. Deliver training, technical assistance, and knowledge-sharing to enhance laboratory capacity and meet members' needs.
 - 3.3. Provide a regional platform for exchanging information, resources, and expertise, linking with other regional and global laboratory networks, and maintaining an effective hub for knowledge sharing.

- 3.4. Expand and maintain a pool of laboratory experts who can be mobilized to provide technical support across thematic areas of the Network.
- 3.5. Serve as a coordinating platform for laboratory systems strengthening, in line with relevant global frameworks or regional entities.

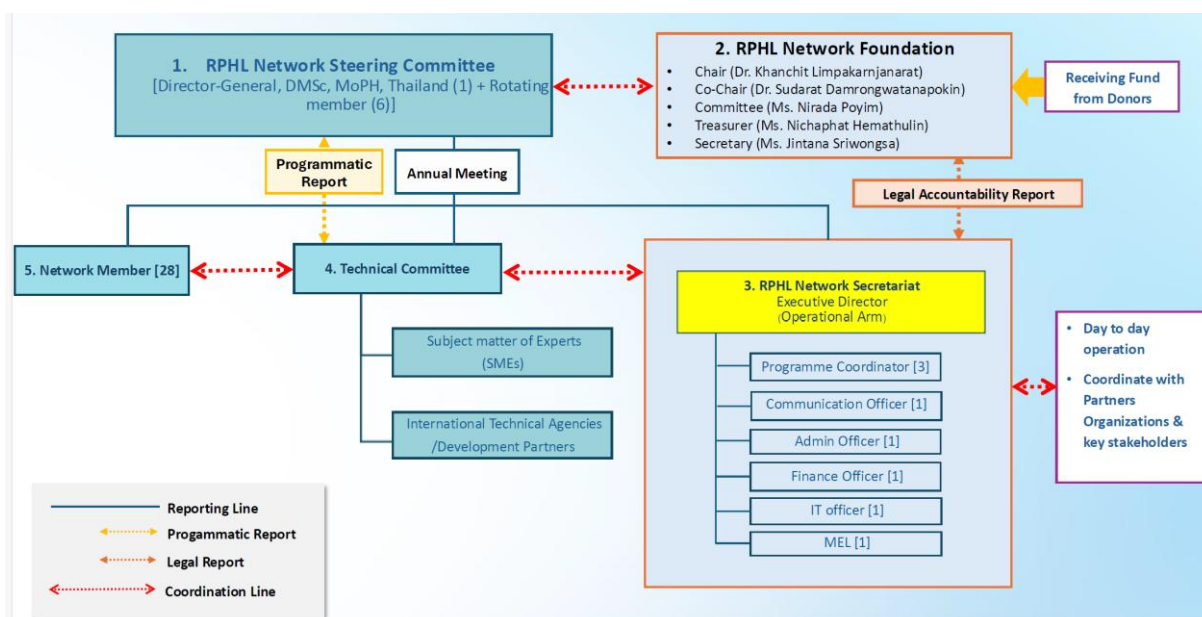
4. Membership

- 6) The RPHL Network is a voluntary platform for national public health laboratories under Ministry of Health or equivalent in Asia-Pacific countries. Members benefit from knowledge and information sharing, capacity building, technical support, and access to resources to strengthen laboratory system capabilities. Each member can be represented by two nominated focal points. Alternate focal point can be nominated:
 - (i) the head of a national public health laboratory, and
 - (ii) a technical-in-charge, laboratory manager, or authorized representative, and
 - (iii) Alternate as a day-to-day coordinator.

- 7) The Network is open to any interested countries in Asia Pacific to become new members. The procedures for new member applications and the exit protocol are outlined in **Annex 1**.

5. Governance Structure

- 8) The RPHL Network’s governance structure comprises five main bodies: (1) Steering Committee, (2) RPHL Network Foundation, (3) RPHL Network Secretariat, (4) Technical Committee, and (5) Network Members. See below for the governance structure diagram.



5.1. Steering Committee

- 9) The Steering Committee is the principal decision-making body of the Network, responsible for setting policy and providing overall strategic direction. It is chaired by Thailand as the permanent Chair, with a rotating Co-Chair selected from among the Network members. The Executive Director of the Secretariat serves as an ex-officio member.
- 10) The Steering Committee provides oversight of the Network's priorities, approves the annual workplan, and ensures alignment with regional and global public health objectives. Further details are provided in **Annex 2: Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee**.

5.2. RPHL Network Foundation [RPHLF]

- 11) The RPHL Network Foundation is established under the laws of Thailand and registered as a juristic person under the Civil and Commercial Code. It serves as the legal entity of the Network and is responsible for fiduciary oversight, financial accountability, and compliance with applicable legal and regulatory requirements.
- 12) The RPHL Network Foundation oversees resource mobilization ensuring the sustainable management of funds from diverse funding sources while the RPHL Network Secretariat ensures operational execution. It plays a key role in safeguarding the long-term sustainability of the Network and its collaborative activities.

5.3. RPHL Network Secretariat

- 13) The RPHL Network Secretariat operates under the RPHL Network Foundation in accordance with the Thai law, serves as the central administrative body of the Network. It provides day-to-day operational, programmatic, and financial management support for the implementation of the Network's activities.
- 14) It is legally accountable to the RPHL Network Foundation and reports on programmatic matters to the Steering Committee. It is responsible for implementing the key strategic directions of the Steering Committee, including the implementation of the approved annual workplan.
- 15) The Secretariat also provides coordination and administrative support to the Network's governance bodies and engagement with key development partners. The Secretariat is hosted by Thailand under the auspices of the Department of Medical Sciences, Ministry of Public Health. More details of its core functions are outlined in its Terms of Reference, **See Annex 3**.

5.4. Technical Committee

- 16) The Technical Committee serves as the advisory body of the Network, providing technical expertise and guidance to support the Network's strategic and programmatic priorities.

- 17) Its members are drawn from the Network's pool of experts and other relevant subject matter experts (SMEs), international technical agencies, and key development partners, ensuring representation across key thematic areas of public health laboratory systems. It contributes to the identification of emerging priorities, the development of technical standards and guidance, and the review of relevant initiatives.
- 18) The Technical Committee provides recommendations to the Steering Committee to support evidence-based decision-making. It supports the Secretariat in the design and implementation of technical activities, including capacity-building initiatives and knowledge-sharing platforms.
- 19) The Technical Committee (TC) may also recommend the creation of Technical Working Groups (TWGs) as needed. Through this mechanism, the Technical Committee ensures that the Network's activities are grounded in scientific and technical rigor and aligned with its strategic objectives. **See Annex 4**

5.5. RPHL Network Members

- 20) Members engage with the Steering Committee and participate in Network planning and decision-making through regular official communications and the annual Network Meeting. In addition, Members serve on the Technical Committee, providing technical guidance to support the Network's priorities. Members are also responsible for notifying the Secretariat of any changes to their designated focal points.
- 21) Consistent with Sections 4 and 7.1 of the Terms of Collaboration, focal points serve as the primary liaison between the Network and their respective countries. Their roles and responsibilities include, but are not limited to:
 - a) Contributing to Network operations, including workplan development and information exchange, and participating in the annual Network Meeting and periodic virtual consultations
 - b) Supporting proposal development by reviewing, providing technical inputs, contributing to proposal evaluation, and, where relevant, initiating and submitting proposals
 - c) Hosting RPHL Network activities, as appropriate,
 - d) Recommending qualified laboratory experts to support Network initiatives,
 - e) Sharing relevant information and resources to facilitate collaboration,
 - f) Engaging in Network communications,
 - g) Providing technical expertise to support the implementation of Network activities.

6. Engagement of Development Partners, Observers, and Other Stakeholders

22) The RPHL Network engages a range of stakeholders, including development partners and observers as determined by Steering Committee. Development partners provide funding, technical, or in-kind support and may share responsibilities in implementing Network initiatives. Observers may include academic institutions, professional bodies, industry associations, other regulatory networks, and research partners who may be invited to meetings and activities but do not participate in any form of decision-making. Other specific stakeholders, as determined by the Steering Committee upon the recommendation of the Secretariat, may participate in Network activities in line with agreed work plans and specific arrangements.

7. Network Mechanisms

23) The RPHL Network maintains the following mechanisms to operate its functions and activities:

7.1. Focal Points

24) In line with Section 4, Network members are represented by focal points designated by their respective countries, serving as the primary liaison between the Network and their country. Focal points are expected to coordinate with the Secretariat, attend annual Network meetings and periodic video conferences, and may be elected to the Steering Committee.

7.2. Annual Network Meeting

25) Network Meeting is convened annually to review achievements, discuss the annual work plan, determine implementation modalities, and address other relevant businesses.

7.3. Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan

26) Network programmes and activities are guided by a multi-year strategic plan and the annual work plan approved by the steering committee. Members may propose regional activities during the annual meeting and provide regional initiatives to address any emerging issues in the region. Members are encouraged to take the leading role in implementing or co-organizing RPHL Network's activities.

7.4. Engagement of Laboratory and Subject Matter Experts

27) RPHL Network's laboratory experts are those experts recommended by members. Meanwhile, SMEs are those who received a master training in different laboratory fields conducted by RPHL Network.

28) The Network engages laboratory and subject matter experts to support the implementation of its programmes, projects, and activities. Such engagement may include, but is not limited to:

7.4.1. Providing technical expertise as a resource person, including speakers, trainers, moderators, and facilitators.

7.4.2. Delivering on-site technical support to Network members as requested

7.4.3. Reviewing reports and publications of the Network prior to uploading on the RPHL Network Website.

7.4.4. Representing the Network in regional or international forums

8. Budget and Financial Management

- 29) Budget oversight is provided by the RPHL Network Foundation, a not-for-profit entity registered under Thai law, with financial management and disbursement conducted in accordance with the RPHL Network Project Management, Finance, and Procurement Guidelines.
- 30) With the support of the Steering Committee, the RPHL Network Secretariat serves as the central coordination point for day-to-day financial operations, including engagement with donors and development partners and coordination of resource mobilization efforts by supporting access to funding opportunities in line with the Network's resource mobilization plan.
- 31) Financial priorities and allocations are aligned with strategic directions, funding available, and approved annual workplan.

9. Transparency and Confidentiality

- 32) By default, the Network's TERMS OF COLLABORATION, strategic plans, work plans and progress reports, names of focal points, and TORs of Steering Committee, Secretariat, and TC with member lists, and adopted agendas and minutes are considered public. Certain discussions, including related documents and information, may be deemed confidential, and their disclosure or publication requires the approval of the Steering Committee and, where applicable. Members of the Steering Committee, Secretariat, TC, and the pool of laboratory and subject matter experts are bound, even after the end of their duties, to maintain professional confidentiality and not disclose sensitive information.

Annex 1

Membership in the RPHL Network

1. Eligibility

33) The RPHL Network is a voluntary platform for national public health laboratories under Ministry of Health or equivalents in Asia-Pacific countries. Membership is open to the national public health laboratories that commit to contributing to and participating in the Network activities.

2. Application Process

34) The following steps apply to new members. Existing members at the time of adoption of this Terms of Collaboration are not required to undergo the process but are encouraged to submit a confirmation letter reaffirming their commitment and updating the focal points as needed.

2.1. Familiarization of the Network

35) Interested countries in Asia-Pacific will submit expressions of interest via email to the Secretariat. The representatives are required to attend an orientation session on Network mechanisms and membership and participate in at least two consecutive members' meetings (including virtual sessions) to familiarize themselves with ongoing operations and discussions.

2.2. Submission of Letter of Intent and Commitment

36) The country's government, through the head of a national public health laboratory or an authorized agency, must submit a letter to the Chair of the RPHL Network Steering committee. The letter should:

2.2.1 Express the country's interest and commitment to the Network.

2.2.2 Designate two focal points from the public health laboratory: (i) the head of a national public health laboratory as the primary contact, (ii) a technical-in-charge, laboratory manager, or authorized representative, and (iii) alternate as a day-to-day coordinator.

2.3. Steering Committee Review and Approval

2.3.1 Proposed by the Secretariat, the Steering Committee reviews submitted applications and endorses the applicant country for provisional membership, as appropriate.

2.3.2 Upon satisfactory completion of the above steps, the Steering Committee issues a formal letter confirming the country's membership in the RPHL Network.

3. Exit Protocol

37) Members may withdraw from the Network by submitting a formal written notice through their designated national public health laboratory or authorized government agency, specifying the effective date of withdrawal. The Steering Committee may also recommend termination of membership for non-compliance with Network obligations, failure to maintain designated focal points, or conduct contrary to the Network's objectives and guidelines. In such cases, the Steering Committee shall review the circumstances and issue formal notice to the member country. Upon exit, the Secretariat will update the Network's records, inform other members, and reassign responsibilities previously held by the departing country.

Annex 2

The Steering Committee of the RPHL Network

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Preamble

- 38) The Regional Public Health Laboratory (RPHL) Network is led by the Steering Committee, which defines the Network's policy direction, provides strategic guidance, and exercises oversight of programmes, and resource mobilization. The Steering Committee supports stakeholder engagement, proposal development, progress, and facilitates decision-making to maximize the impact of the Network's programmes, projects, and activities.

2. Specific Roles

The Steering Committee has the following roles and responsibilities:

2.1. Defining Policy Direction

- 39) The Steering Committee sets the Network's policy direction, ensuring alignment with its vision, objectives, strategic work plan, and emerging priorities. It upholds governance structures and guides transitions between project phases to support long-term sustainability.

2.2. Providing Strategic Guidance

- 40) The Steering Committee provides strategic guidance to maximize impact and ensure effective resource allocation. It supports priority setting and approves annual work plans developed by the Secretariat.

2.3. Resource Mobilization

- 41) The Steering Committee leads resource mobilization and oversees programme implementation by monitoring progress, timelines, and deliverables.

2.4. Supporting Stakeholder Engagement and Project Development

- 42) The Steering Committee advises on engagement with government, development partners, and technical stakeholders. It recommends project activities and supports the development of concept notes, proposals, and initiatives that strengthen continuity, partnerships, and sustainability.

3. Composition and Term of Office

- 43) The Steering Committee shall be composed of the following members:

3.1. Permanent Chair

Director-General of the Department of Medical Sciences (DMSc), Ministry of Public Health, Thailand, serves as The Steering Committee's permanent Chair.

3.2. Five Elected Members

- 44) In addition to Thailand, five members shall be elected by the Network to serve on the Steering Committee. These elected members shall serve a term of two years and may be re-elected. During their term, the elected members shall select one among themselves to serve as Co-Chair of the Steering Committee. To recognize the country hosting the Annual or Biennial Partnership Forum, the host country for that year shall automatically serve as Co-Chair. The selection of elected members will be guided by a combination of alphabetical rotation and voluntary participation.

If an elected member is unable to continue in their duties, a replacement may be selected from Network members to serve the remainder of the term.

3.3. Ex Officio Member

- 45) The Executive Director (ED) of the Secretariat serves as an ex officio member and does not have voting rights.

3.4. Advisors

- 46) The Steering Committee may retain three to five advisors who have no voting rights but contribute to Steering Committee discussions by providing strategic insights and ensuring alignment with international, regional, and laboratory cooperation frameworks. The specific background or expertise of the advisors shall be determined by the Steering Committee upon the recommendation of the Secretariat.

4. Meetings and Decision-Making

47) The Steering Committee shall meet annually, with the option to convene special meetings as necessary. A quorum of four members, excluding advisors and the Executive Director of the Secretariat, is required to conduct a meeting. Decisions are made by consensus/ majority vote.

48) For onsite meetings, Steering Committee members shall be entitled to logistical support and allowances.

49) For urgent issues, the Permanent Chair and/or Co-Chair may issue a circular through the Secretariat to solicit feedback or request decisions.

5. Secretariat Support

50) The Secretariat shall provide administrative, logistical, and record-keeping support to the Steering Committee, including coordinating meetings, preparing agendas, arranging travel and accommodations for onsite meetings, maintaining minutes, following up on Steering Committee decisions, and disseminating summaries and concept notes to members for review or concurrence.

Annex 3

The RPHL Network Secretariat TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Preamble

51) The RPHL Network Secretariat serves as the central operational and coordinating body of the Network. It functions under the RPHL Network Foundation, a legal entity registered under Thai law, to ensure the effective implementation of Steering Committee decisions, the strategic plan, and the annual work plan. In carrying out these duties, the Secretariat works in close consultation with the Steering Committee.”

2. Core Functions

2.1. Programme Management

52) The Secretariat implements programmes, projects, and activities in line with the approved strategic and annual work plans, the Steering Committee decisions, and Technical Committee recommendations. It manages day-to-day operations from activity design and conceptualization to monitoring, evaluation, and reporting. The Secretariat publishes annual reports and submits them to the Steering Committee, Network members, and donors for progress monitoring, impact demonstration, and accountability.

2.2. Administrative, Financial, and Grant Management

53) Align with Foundation’s regulations, Secretariat manages finances, donor funds, procurement, sub-grants, and contracts in accordance with approved guidelines, ensuring timely and transparent financial reporting.

2.3. Partnership Building & Resource Mobilization

54) The Secretariat functions as the principal liaison with partners, facilitates the identification and pursuit of funding opportunities, and ensures the effective implementation of partner engagement and resource mobilization strategies.

2.4. Communications, Knowledge Management & Advocacy

55) The Secretariat manages the RPHL Network website and other communication platforms, documents and shares knowledge products and best practices, and advocates for the Network, representing the network at regional and international forums.

2.5. Coordination, Facilitation, and Member Support

56) The Secretariat acts as the first point of contact for members’ requests, facilitates peer-to-peer learning and collaboration, and coordinates the Annual Network Meeting, the Annual Partnership Forum, and other key Network events.

3. Hiring & Composition

57) The Secretariat will be recruited by the RPHL Network Foundation in accordance with Thai law. It shall be headed by an Executive Director (ED) and minimum comprise programme management, communications, administrative, finance officer, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) officer and Information Technology. The ED shall determine staffing structures and levels in accordance with the approved annual work plan, budget, and long-term organizational objectives.

4. Resources

58) The day-to-day operations of the Secretariat shall be supported through diversified sources, including project-based contributions from donors and partners, and may be supplemented by in-kind support. The Steering Committee, with Thailand as the permanent Chair through the Department of Medical Sciences, shall be responsible for ensuring the continuity of the Secretariat's operationalization, including office spaces.

Annex 4

The RPHL Network Technical Committee TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Preamble

59) The Technical Committee (TC) serves to uphold scientific rigor and ensure that RPHL Network initiatives align with international best practices and regional priorities. It provides strategic technical guidance to the Secretariat to ensure that all Network activities are evidence-based, aligned with regional and global health priorities, and implemented in compliance with internationally recognized standards.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

60) The Technical Committee (TC) is responsible for providing expert technical guidance, strategic recommendations, and support for resource mobilization.

2.1. Technical Guidance and Review

61) The TC provides expert review, validation, and endorsement of key technical documents, tools, and frameworks developed by the Network. It also contributes technical input during the design, implementation, and evaluation of RPHL Network projects and initiatives to ensure scientific rigor and alignment with relevant frameworks and best practices.

2.2. Strategic Recommendations

62) The TC advises the Secretariat on emerging technical priorities, capacity gaps, and opportunities across the Network's thematic areas and other relevant domains, including translation knowledge in public health laboratory systems.

2.3. Resource and Expertise Mobilization

63) The TC supports the preparation of project proposals and concept notes to mobilize technical and financial resources, leveraging its expertise to strengthen and sustain the Network's initiatives.

3. Composition and Term of Office

64) The Technical Committee (TC) shall comprise up to 11 core members drawn from Network SMEs, international technical agencies, key development partners, and global experts as determined by Steering Committee, representing diverse disciplines relevant to public health laboratory systems. The composition will ensure diversity in expertise, geographic representation, and institutional affiliation, and include at least one representative from a "One Health" sector (e.g., veterinary or environmental health). Members are nominated by the Secretariat and approved by the Steering Committee. Each member serves a two-year term, renewable as needed. The Technical Committee shall elect the Chair to serve a three-year term, with the Secretariat convening the meeting.

4. Meetings and Decision-Making

65) The TC shall meet semi-annually, either physical or online, or as needed. The Secretariat provides administrative and logistical support, including meeting coordination, agenda preparation, record keeping, and communication facilitation.

5. Administrative Arrangement

66) The Secretariat shall provide administrative, logistical, and record-keeping support to the Technical Committee, including coordinating meetings, preparing agendas, arranging travel and accommodations for onsite meetings, maintaining minutes, and disseminating summaries and concept notes to members for review and comments.