

Statistical Commission  
Thirty-eighth session  
27 February - 2 March 2007  
Item 4(b) of the provisional agenda  
**Items for information: Health statistics**

Background document  
Available in English only

**Summary of minutes of the second session of the  
Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Health Statistics  
Geneva, 19-20 June 2006**

Prepared by the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Health Statistics

## Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Health Statistics

### Summary of minutes of the second session of the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Health Statistics Geneva, 19-20 June 2006

#### Note for the Record

The Second Session Inter-Secretariat Working Group in Health Statistics (ISWG-HS) was convened by the World Health Organization, with facilitation by the UN Statistics Division, to develop a coordinated and integrated agenda for the production of health statistics and agree on standard definitions, classifications and methodologies in health statistics. The meeting was attended by agencies (World Bank, Eurostat, FAO, UNFPA, OECD, WHO, UNSD) and two country representatives (USA, Botswana). Many countries had sent regrets. The expected outcomes of the meeting were:

- To reach agreement on the Terms of Reference and two-year work plan for the ISWG-HS on Health Statistics
- To discuss current practices in key areas of health statistics including estimation methodologies, definitions, core indicators, metadata, reporting mechanisms, data bases.

The participants provided minor comments on the functions of the ISWG, mostly recommending reducing the set of functions if possible. There was a desire not to duplicate work programs or reporting mechanisms in place elsewhere but there was a strong interest in developing a mechanism that would increase the interaction between UN agencies, with particular emphasis on WHO, and UN member states (for the statistical constituencies with member states).

The topic areas in health statistics are numerous and diverse, in particular the ones who have received less attention in health statistical expert working groups. Four core areas retained the attention of the ISWG:

- Strengthening of national health information systems (Health Metrics Network)
- Health, disability and mortality measurement (with a focus on health surveys and civil registration system)
- International Classification of Diseases and disabilities
- Metadata standards and practices

With regards to the *Health Metrics Network*, a concerted effort to forge stronger links between health and statistical constituencies, it was mentioned that the Statistical Commission cannot endorse or adopt HMN documents (e.g. these related to the framework for the assessment of health information systems. The participants felt it would be immensely useful if the Statistical Commission, working through member states on the ISWG-HS, could more actively promote the work of HMN.

Concerning *health disability and mortality measurement*, the participants HS acknowledged the various efforts presented and their common goal into providing valid and reliable measures for health and disabilities. They also stressed the importance of enhancing coordination among them even if the value of seeking a unified health survey program across all UN agencies was not clear. While there was agreement that the ISWG-HS would not be involved in day to day activities, the ISWG-HS would provide the mechanism through which information would be exchanged so that there could be greater joint involvement of statistical agencies and UN agencies in this work. This would avoid overlapping and conflicting methodologies and increase input to the various streams

of work. This requires maintaining across health agencies the interchange of survey information. For example, the UN and WHO have agreed to work together in selected countries (for example in Namibia), with National Statistical Offices and Ministries of Health to improve coverage of vital registration systems especially where there is already a system in place (good coverage of deaths in hospitals, with medical certified cause of death).

In relation with *metadata*, the ISWG-HS acknowledged the critical importance of documenting metadata, especially as a tool to enhance the quality, credibility and accountability of health statistics. More work needs to be done in the harmonization and dissemination of metadata associated with health statistics.

Discussing the role of international organizations in the *adjustment of country reported data for international comparability or to provide estimates from fragmented or indirect evidence*, participants stressed the importance of enhancing country capacities to generate estimates. They insisted that agencies may need to continue to develop estimates where data are missing while engaging in strengthening statistical capacity building at country level.

The ISWG-HS 2 *concluded* that the ISWG can become a platform to improve statistical practices by international organizations. One important aspect is metadata practices. Another related to what the UN Statistical Commission refers to as imputation of statistics (also referred to as corrected or predicted statistics in health) and the general practice of adjustment. The ISWG-HS can be a forum where guidelines can be developed that would be acceptable to the UN agencies and the countries. The link between the CCSA and ISWG-HS is also important.