

# PACIFIC HEADS OF HEALTH

Réunion des directeurs de la santé du Pacifique

SPC/PHD/HOH15

Working paper No.8.0

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

## 15<sup>th</sup> PACIFIC HEADS OF HEALTH MEETING

15-17 April 2024, Apia Samoa

### HEALTHY PACIFIC SCHOOLS NETWORK

Taking action to ensure a healthy future for all children in the Pacific region

(Paper presented by Dr. Philippe Biarez, French Polynesia)



#### SUMMARY

- Children are our islands' future and their health is a priority for health policies on a regional level
- The Healthy Schools concept seeks to promote health among children in the school setting and aligns with the Healthy Islands vision (Yanuca, 1996).
- In response to a shared interest in building regional collaboration and to ensure that health is a central focus of school activities, the **Healthy Pacific Schools Network** was created in June 2023 during a meeting organized jointly by French Polynesia's Health Department, the Pacific Community and the *Association Partage Santé Pacifique* (Pacific Health Sharing Association). Participants included representatives from the health and education sectors of the Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, Niue, Vanuatu and French Polynesia.
- Since that time, the members of the **Healthy Pacific Schools Network** meet regularly to structure the network (drafting a joint action charter for member countries), develop tools useful for the network's operation (creating the platform, <https://www.healthy-pacific-schools.com/>), participate in scientific information sessions (workshop on evaluating healthy schools actions), and highlight the actions taken by a member country (certification of the schools in Wallis and Futuna).
- The **Healthy Pacific Schools Network** will be in a position to accept new members starting next year, but identifying sustainable funding to promote exchanges among members remains a critical issue.

## BACKGROUND

1. Children spend considerable time at school and this environment should support good health. In addition, because school is also a place for education, health education should also be an integral part of what is learned. Last, good health is a prerequisite for fulfilling education.
2. The health-promoting schools concept was proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1996 and introduced in the Pacific in 2009. It seeks to promote health in schools by targeting the entire school environment. This approach is consistent with the Healthy Islands vision (Yanuca, 1996). Many Pacific Island countries have adapted the concept to their territory. Although their goals are identical, their systems and implementation differ.
3. In response to a shared interest in building regional collaboration and to ensure that health is a central focus of school activities, the **Healthy Pacific Schools Network** was created in June 2023 during a meeting organized jointly by French Polynesia's Health Department, the Pacific Community and the *Association Partage Santé Pacifique* (Pacific Health Sharing Association). This event brought together representatives from the health and education sectors from the Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, Niue, Vanuatu and French Polynesia and laid the foundation for a regional collaboration.

### Introduction to the Healthy Pacific Schools Network

4. Goals of the Healthy Pacific Schools Network
  - a) Promote the Healthy Schools concept and encourage its implementation in schools in the Pacific region
  - b) Facilitate the sharing of experiences, good practices and challenges that member countries have encountered
  - c) Build collaboration between the region's schools and health promotion services on the national and regional levels
  - d) Identify stakeholders' needs in the field regarding implementation of the Healthy Schools concept and propose appropriate solutions
  - e) Maintain the motivation of educational staff involved in a Healthy School process by holding attractive and regular events
  - f) Coordinate and facilitate sharing of the health data collected from students to ensure monitoring of the health of the region's children

### Healthy Pacific Schools Network's structure

5. The network includes a steering committee and a scientific committee.
6. The **steering committee** is composed of two representatives appointed by each member country, i.e. an education expert and a health expert. The committee is responsible for defining the strategic guidelines, seeking funding, and coordinating and leading the network. A different country chairs the steering committee each year. The network's current members - and, thus, the steering committee's members – are French Polynesia, Niue, the Cook Islands, Wallis and Futuna, and New Caledonia.

7. The **scientific committee**, composed of scientific experts in the areas of health, education sciences and health promotion, advises the steering committee on all matters submitted to it. Based on the requests submitted, it provides its expertise to network members.

8. The **Pacific Community** (SPC) is currently the network's main partner. It supported the network's creation and offers critical on-going technical and financial support.

9. The network's official languages are French and English. SPC provides interpretation services free of charge at each meeting so that everyone can express their views.

### Healthy Pacific Schools Network's activities

10. The network's mission is to create and set up tools that can facilitate sharing of practices among its member countries. To date, the platform is operational - <https://www.healthy-pacific-schools.com/> - and each network member may share content there.



### Funding

11. The Pacific Community and the French Pacific Fund currently provide funding. Research is underway to identify other possible donors.

### Next steps

- Finalise the joint action charter (currently being drafted)
- Hold network meeting in Noumea in May addressing the topic of evaluation, with presentations by French and Australian academics
- Hold network meeting in Wallis and Futuna in November to take part in the first on-site school certifications
- Extend the network to other interested countries in the region starting in 2025
- Seek funding to cover the network's operations.

**PACIFIC HEADS OF HEALTH ARE INVITED TO:**

- Reaffirm their interest in implementing the Healthy Schools concept in the Pacific region to improve student health
- Express their support for the Healthy Pacific Schools Network, created at the countries' initiative and led by the Pacific countries
- Join the Healthy Pacific Schools Network if they believe that it will help to encourage or strengthen establishment of the Healthy Schools concept in their country.

**PARTNERS ARE INVITED TO:**

- Support the network, technically and financially, so that it can expand to all countries in the region and ensure its continuity.
-