

Unlocking Cobenefits for Health Security and Surveillance
Global Health Security Conference 2026 - Kuala Lumpur
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Lunch Panel Discussion

Introduction

The biological threat landscape is evolving rapidly, with increased likelihood of naturally occurring infectious diseases paired with growing threats from biological warfare and misuse of biotechnology. As geopolitics influence a constrained fiscal landscape, increased defence spending, and shrinking development assistance, it is clear that we must reassess our approach to disease surveillance and promote investments with co-benefits towards a broader conceptualization of security. This lunch dialogue will unpack practical examples of how to advance co-benefit investments for disease surveillance by working more purposefully across traditional silos of health, biosecurity, and defense – especially at the civil-military interface.

Background

The biological threat landscape is evolving rapidly, with increased likelihood of naturally occurring infectious diseases paired with growing threats from biological warfare and misuse of biotechnology. Shifting geopolitics are also dramatically shifting the landscape, as new and persistent conflicts strain existing institutions and drive a reassessment of defence investments — too often at the expense of health and global partnerships, despite the fact that health security is inextricably linked to national security and military readiness. These connected challenges make it clear that we must reassess our current, siloed approach to health security and disease surveillance, and present a strategic opportunity to better leverage dual-benefit investments for health security at the civil-military interface.

The WHO [defines collaborative surveillance](#) as “the systematic strengthening of capacity and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, both within and beyond the health sector, with the ultimate goal of enhancing public health intelligence and improving evidence for decision making.” But while there has been increased collaboration across geographies and between the human and animal health sectors, there has been limited action to better link and leverage surveillance and disease detection systems across the public health and defense/security sectors.

The defense sector has tremendous capabilities in disease and biological threat detection — in fact it was U.S. military surveillance systems that detected initial cases on H1N1 during the 2009 outbreak. But outside of major health emergencies, civil-military collaboration on disease detection and surveillance has not been optimized. Health systems are also among the most vulnerable critical infrastructure, making defense investments in health of strategic importance to civilian security – including leveraging the [NATO commitment](#) to 1.5% spending on activities to “protect critical infrastructure, defend networks, ensure civil preparedness and resilience, innovate, and strengthen the defence industrial base.” Especially as the [WHO reports](#) that “recent suspensions and reductions in ODA are disrupting all health system functions, with the most frequently reported impacts being on health emergency preparedness and

response(70%) and public health surveillance (66%),” it is clear that we need a new type of collaborative effort, purpose-built for our current moment in time.

In this session we will set out how enhanced civil-military cooperation can lead to more nimble, comprehensive, and sustainably resourced disease detection and surveillance capabilities– with broad benefits for both public health and national security. The panel discussion will explore tangible steps for how to advance collaboration on biological threat detection and surveillance, including taking an all-hazards approach that links strategic and operational threats to national and human security. The discussion will also focus on how to make civil–military cooperation on detection and surveillance interoperable in practice, such as through shared standards, pilots, or funding alignment, to drive true dual-use capabilities so that ‘peacetime co-benefits’ become measurable preparedness outputs.