



WHA79 Side Event Report – Securing the Future: Building a Sustainable Ecosystem for Antimicrobial Innovation

22 May 2026 | WHO Headquarters, Geneva

Overview

The [International Pharmaceutical Students' Federation \(IPSF\)](#), the [Alliance for the Health Promotion](#), the Government of Japan, the [Japan Institute for Health Security \(JIHS\)](#), and the [Leadership in Enhancing Antimicrobial Discovery \(LEAD\)](#) co-hosted a panel discussion as an official side event during the 79th World Health Assembly (WHA79). The session explored how to build a sustainable, equitable ecosystem for antimicrobial innovation. Bringing together perspectives from a range of stakeholders, the discussion highlighted that challenges in antimicrobial R&D go beyond science and market dynamics, and called for more coordinated approaches across research, health systems, and global partnerships.

Key Messages

1. Antimicrobial innovation as a system-wide challenge

The event underscored that, despite important progress, structural limitations persist in sustaining the antimicrobial pipeline. While this challenge is often framed in terms of market incentives, it also reflects a capacity issue, including the loss of expertise and limited renewal of the next generation of researchers.



Therefore, antimicrobial innovation is best understood as a system-wide challenge, requiring stronger coordination across research, health systems, and global partnerships.

2. Recognising antimicrobials as public goods

The session emphasised the value of recognising antimicrobials as public goods, where long-term public health outcomes are prioritised alongside innovation incentives.



This framing supports sustained investment in infrastructure, data systems, and human capital that underpin innovation continuity. It also highlights the need to better position antimicrobial R&D within broader health system frameworks. While core public health functions such as surveillance and stewardship are well established, antimicrobial R&D remains less systematically integrated.

3. Collaborative approaches to innovation

The event also highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration across countries and institutions, with a focus on trust, coordination, and shared responsibility across the innovation pathway.

In this context, the “Nakama model” was introduced as one example of a system-centred, collaborative approach. Related initiatives such as [iCROWN](#) and [ARISE](#) illustrate how elements of this model are being implemented in practice.

4. Strengthening inclusive global participation and capacity

Expanding engagement with low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) was recognised as essential for strengthening sustainable antimicrobial innovation, particularly in regions with high infectious disease burden.

This includes moving beyond models that position countries primarily as recipients of innovation, towards approaches that enable meaningful

participation as partners in research and innovation processes. From this perspective, capacity building supports not only the adoption of innovations, but also the ability to contribute to and shape R&D efforts, as reflected in system-integrated, collaborative approaches such as the Nakama model.

Emerging capabilities, including genomic surveillance in settings where such capacities are rapidly advancing, such as Nigeria, illustrate opportunities to strengthen locally driven research and better inform research priorities. These developments also contribute to health system strengthening and global health security.

5. Investing in people and capacity

A strong emphasis was placed on the need for sustained investment in the scientific workforce, including clear career pathways for early-career researchers and multidisciplinary collaboration. The discussion reinforced that human capacity and institutional continuity are central to long-term innovation. Strengthening and retaining multidisciplinary expertise across the antimicrobial innovation system will be critical to addressing current challenges and ensuring the sustainability of innovation efforts.

Youth engagement also emerged as an important element, with growing global interest in AMR and active participation in international initiatives. Sustaining this momentum through mentorship and structured opportunities will be critical for building future capacity in



antimicrobial innovation. Building on this, youth-led science communication on AMR was highlighted as an important contribution, both for reaching peers and non-traditional audiences as well as for translating the complex scientific concepts in an accessible and accurate way.

6. Balancing present and future needs

Discussions during the session emphasised that growing burdens from non-communicable diseases (e.g. cancer) further strengthens the case for investment in AMR, including R&D – an argument that is not commonly articulated. The session also acknowledged the importance of addressing both access to existing antimicrobials and long-term innovation for new treatments, recognising these as complementary priorities rather than competing ones.

Conclusion

The side event highlighted the need to move beyond viewing antimicrobial innovation solely through the lens of market incentives and pipeline gaps. Instead, it pointed to the importance of addressing underlying capacity constraints, including the sustainability of the scientific workforce and the systems that support innovation. Strengthening linkages between research, public health functions, and global partnerships will be critical to ensure that innovation is both sustained and locally relevant.

Sustainable antimicrobial innovation therefore depends not only on financial investment, but on people, systems, and sustained collaboration.

This is a report of an Official Side Event, which took place on the sidelines of the Seventy-ninth World Health Assembly. It is not an official Health Assembly report and does not necessarily represent the decisions or policies of WHO.



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