

## **MCH Handbook Webinar Series 2021**

23 September 2021

Dear International Committee and Local Organizing Committee,

Dear participants and friends.

It is my great pleasure to be with you at this third webinar on the MCH handbook series.

Since its first publication in 1948 in Japan, many countries have adopted MCH Handbooks.

For more than seven decades, thousands and millions of families around the globe have received the handbooks to keep health records of pregnant women, mothers and children, and to receive valuable health information.

As her imperial Highness Princess (Akishino) Kiko-sama mentioned in her affectionate and supportive message at the 2<sup>nd</sup> webinar, mothers and families in the world have contributed to improve the MCH handbook.

The MCH handbook have become a very simple but powerful tool that contributes to good health, better quality of life and improved care.

MCH handbooks are a model of people-centred care. They put pregnant women, mothers and children at the centre.

One of the key features of the handbook is that mothers and families can access and manage multiple health records and information in one single place.

They can use this information to guide their communication and interactions with healthcare providers during pregnancy, delivery, childhood diseases, immunization, or child growth.

MCH handbooks are a model for empowering users through increasing ownership over health and stimulating health literacy with accessible health information which also helps to build trust in health care institutions.

And very important, MCH handbooks have forged an inclusive avenue by engaging men and other family members in maternal and child health.

In many occasions, MHC handbooks are linked to social protection mechanisms seeking to provide comprehensive, integrated care and services to those that most need them.

The MCH handbook approach is an example of the instruments we need to build more supportive, more equitable and safer societies, which is of outmost importance as we build back from the COVID-19 crisis.

Advancing inclusiveness and equity is the direction we need to go to tackle the inequities exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic.

We need creative and innovative policies to design similar instruments that address the growing complexities in our societies.

But the MHC handbook also face important challenges.

In the era of digitalization, future MCH handbooks are being discussed.

In fact, new technologies can help to prevent loss of information, enhance the users' experience, and facilitate communication with services providers and among them as well.

We will hear more about it today.

Likewise, in some settings, MCH handbooks may not be used by caregivers due to lack of awareness, or may require improvements in design and content.

It may also need to more fit for diversified family structures.

That is why we need to expand use and uptake as well as to ensure the quality, through having MCH handbook champions, and enlarge the research findings.

We need international cooperation to continue moving forward. Just recently, WHO, UNICEF and JICA have signed a memorandum of understanding to continue working in this path.

Also, an international coordination group has been established to encourage partners to work together, share important lessons and continue building the evidence base.

We need political leadership to translate policies into concrete actions that strengthen the adaptation of MCH handbooks.

Today, I wish you very enriching and stimulating discussions, so we can all work together for a world where every child can have a promising start and development for a solid future.

I thank you.