



## MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES

### Minister for Health & Medical Services

### Honourable Dr Atonio Rabici Lalabalavu

## PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT ON ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

**Venue:** Parliament of Fiji

**Time:** TBC

**Date:** Week of 2nd to 6th Sept 2024

**Honourable Speaker, Distinguished Members of the House, and Esteemed Citizens,**

Good morning, and Ni Sa Bula Vinaka to you all. I stand before this august assembly today to address a matter of utmost importance—the relentless battle against Antimicrobial Resistance, commonly known as AMR. AMR, as the World Health Organization defines it, occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites no longer respond to antimicrobial medicines. You may be aware of antibiotics which the doctor might have given you when you were sick, this is one type of antimicrobial medicine. It is the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials that is leading to AMR.

In May 2015, during the 68th World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland, the global community took a decisive step by adopting the Global Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance. Since then, our collective efforts have gained momentum—a momentum that extends beyond Fiji’s shores, encompassing our region and the entire world.

## The Threat We Face

Ladies and gentlemen, AMR is not merely a scientific concern; it is a threat to our very existence. It jeopardises lives today and imperils the hard-won advancements of modern medicine. Antimicrobials—our medical cornerstone—underpin surgical procedures, infectious disease management, and fundamental patient care. Imagine a world where these vital tools lose their effectiveness due to resistance. A world where simple injuries could mean Hospital admissions or a world where diseases such as Pneumonia can no longer be treated. We cannot afford such a scenario.

Alarm bells rang in 2016 when a report chaired by Jim O’Neill called “Tackling Drug-Resistant Infections Globally: Final Report And Recommendations - The Review On Antimicrobial Resistance” predicted that by the year 2050, 10 million deaths will be attributed to AMR globally, surpassing the deaths from cancer and diabetes<sup>1</sup>. The bugs are getting stronger, yet there are no new antibiotics to treat them.

A report from the World Bank in 2017 entitled “Drug-Resistant Infections: A Threat to Our Economic Future” framed the economic cost of AMR and the impact that it would have on the world in the not-too-distant future, predicting that an estimated 3.8% of global GDP could be lost annually and push 28 million people into poverty<sup>2</sup>.

By 2019, the World Health Organization had reported that 1.27 million deaths<sup>3</sup> globally had been a direct result of AMR infections and contributed to the deaths of an additional 4.95 million people. The numbers are already piling up as we face escalating challenges from micro-organisms, and Fiji is not immune

In recent years, we have faced outbreaks of formidable foes like *Acinetobacter baumannii* and other carbapenem-resistant organisms (CROs) within our major health facilities, these are what we call “super- bugs”. These challenges remind us that the battle against this silent pandemic is far from over. Yet, we remain vigilant and resolute, steadfast in our commitment to protect our people.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://amr-review.org/sites/default/files/160525\\_Final%20paper\\_with%20cover.pdf](https://amr-review.org/sites/default/files/160525_Final%20paper_with%20cover.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/323311493396993758/pdf/final-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antimicrobial-resistance>

We have made significant strides in enhancing our capacities across various aspects of healthcare—be it in surgical interventions, advanced dialysis, or critical care. However, let us remember that even the most sophisticated medical procedures can be rendered futile if our patients fall prey to infections caused by resistant organisms.

But this is not a cause for despair; it is a call to action. It shows us the importance of our ongoing efforts and the need to strengthen our resolve. Together, we can ensure that our advancements in healthcare are not undermined by the threat of antimicrobial resistance. We will continue to fight, innovate, and protect the health of every Fijian, ensuring that no life is lost to preventable and treatable infections.

### **Fiji's Mitigation Strategy**

We are not passive observers in this fight. Fiji has a robust mitigation strategy—the National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP AMR). Launched in its second edition in November 2022, the NAP AMR outlines key goals, milestones, and collaborative partnerships. Our path forward lies in unity—knowing our adversary and acting collectively.

The One Health approach to mitigating AMR mandates that we work collaboratively across not only human health but also with our animal health and partners in the environment space. This cross-sectoral approach recognises the importance of data sharing, cooperation, the multi-disciplinary approach and the importance of the ecosystem we all share. One Health is not only a method but also a powerful tool in our arsenal against AMR. I invite my other colleagues in animal health and environmental health to work together to stop this global threat.

With the National Action Plan on AMR in hand, strong cross-sectoral collaboration and good governance mechanisms in place, there is hope yet for our people. Fiji's National Antimicrobial Resistance Committee (NARC) has led the way in the Pacific and globally on the path of AMR mitigation strategies. I commend the tireless efforts of the National Antimicrobial Resistance Committee. NARC has been active, and we owe gratitude to our partners in the AMR space, including WHO, SPC, and other regional bodies.

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### **The Role of Awareness**

Awareness plays a pivotal role in our shared fight. It is not confined to healthcare professionals alone; every citizen—whether child or parent—holds a stake. We must educate, empower, and engage. Our battle against AMR begins with understanding what we fight against. We all learnt valuable lessons from COVID-19, the need for proper hygiene practices such as hand washing, the use of masks to prevent the spread of germs and diseases, and the need to protect ourselves from old and emerging diseases using vaccines. The message must go out there that together, we can prevent needless deaths and suffering. We all play a part in this and it is our shared responsibility to fight against this silent pandemic.

Since 2015, NARC has consistently organized World AMR Awareness Week from November 18th to the 24th. This is an important global occasion during which we recognise the threat of AMR and the importance of spreading awareness on how we can protect ourselves. Awareness is our weapon, and together, we shall prevail.

Take heed when doctors and pharmacists tell you to finish your course of antibiotics and do not ask for antibiotics when your healthcare professional says you don't need it. Don't share antibiotics with friends and family. Every little bit helps and we must listen to professional advice when it is given.

Get vaccinated against vaccine-preventable diseases and eat a balanced and healthy diet to boost your immune system.

Use antibiotics and antimicrobials rationally whether you are a healthcare professional or a member of the public, we all have a role to play.

Educate other members of your family and your friends on the importance of preventing AMR, remember, we are all in this together.

In closing, let us remember that our fight against AMR transcends borders. It is a shared responsibility—one that unites us in safeguarding our health, our future, and the generations to come. Our actions today determine the future we live in tomorrow. Let us come together, from all sectors and walks of life to fight this common enemy.

Vinaka vakalevu.

