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AUB GHI Launches Region's First Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Certificate at PEPP MENA Forum 2025

The Global Health Institute (GHI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) convened the "Pandemic and Epidemic Preparedness (PEPP) MENA Forum 2025: Strengthening Global Health Security—Preparedness as the Foundation of Anticipatory Action." The forum marked the official launch of the Certificate in Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness (CEPP) by AUB GHI, the first of its kind in the MENA region. The event brought together experts, policymakers, and practitioners to explore how collaboration, innovation, and knowledge can strengthen regional preparedness and response to future health emergencies.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Shadi Saleh, founding director of AUB GHI, highlighted that the Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Program (EPaPP) has long served as a flagship initiative of the Global Health Institute. He reaffirmed that GHI continues to strengthen national and regional capacities, foster epidemic and pandemic preparedness, and advance global collaboration to address emerging health challenges. Dr. Qamar Mahmood, senior program specialist at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), spoke about the vital role of IDRC in supporting research and capacity building across low- and middle-income countries. He emphasized the importance of collaboration, gender equity, and strengthening health systems to advance epidemic and pandemic preparedness in the MENA region and beyond.

Delivering the keynote address, Dr. Gabriel Novelo Sierra, Health Emergencies Program team lead at the World Health Organization (WHO) Lebanon, stated that preparedness is not merely a technical pursuit but a shared responsibility and moral imperative. He highlighted the role of regional solidarity, people-centered capacity building, and initiatives like GHI's Certificate in Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness in strengthening health systems across the MENA region. Following the keynote, Nour Zaouk, manager of the Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Program at GHI, introduced the broader [EPaPP initiatives](#), and officially launched [the Certificate in Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness \(CEPP\)](#), an evidence-based, self-paced online program designed by regional experts for regional professionals. Zaouk drew attention to GHI's interdisciplinary approach and its commitment to building resilient and prepared health systems across the region.

The forum featured two panels. The first, moderated by Dr. Nadine Sabra, manager of the E-Sahha Program at GHI, explored "The Certificate in Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness (CEPP): Addressing Regional Capacity Gaps," bringing together key actors from diverse backgrounds. Dr. Souha Kanj, professor of medicine and infectious disease at the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUBMC), stressed the need for a unified regional

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framework to build workforce capacity and harmonize preparedness across the MENA region. Dr. Atika Berry, head of preventive medicine at the Ministry of Public Health in Lebanon, highlighted the importance of integrating policy and ethics training to ensure evidence-based and accountable decision-making during crises.

Dr. Antoine Abou Fayad, associate professor of experimental pathology, immunology and microbiology at AUB, underlined the vital role of laboratories and two-way communication between the field, lab, and government. Dr. Nesrine Rizk, associate professor of clinical medicine at AUBMC, showcased how CEPP's competency-based, regionally relevant modules foster collaboration and confidence across disciplines, building a stronger regional health workforce.

The second panel, moderated by Dr. Rouba Ziade, associate researcher at the National Center for Natural Hazards and Early Warning, brought together leading experts to discuss "Pandemic and Epidemic Preparedness Post-COVID: Exploring Paths to Sustainable Global Health Security." Dr. Kamran Khan, founder and CEO of BlueDot (Epidemic Intelligence) and professor at the University of Toronto, emphasized AI-driven epidemic intelligence that integrates across sectors to detect threats early, build trust, and enable proactive outbreak response.

Dr. Farida Al Hosani, deputy CEO of the Global Institute for Disease Elimination and chair of the WHO Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Advisory Group in the United Arab Emirates, highlighted the UAE's whole-of-government model for preparedness, stressing long-term investment, intersectoral coordination, and data integration as pillars of resilience and global health equity. Charbel Elia, regional senior officer for anticipatory actions at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Lebanon, called for shifting from reactive response to proactive anticipatory action, linking early warning systems with community-level preparedness and pre-funded early interventions.

Dr. Nada Ghosn, head of the Epidemiological Surveillance Program at the Ministry of Public Health in Lebanon, showcased how AI enhances surveillance and diagnostics, enabling faster detection, analysis, and forecasting while underscoring the need to build staff capacity and ethical AI use. Dr. Gabriel Novelo Sierra, Health Emergencies Program team lead at WHO Lebanon, explained how the Pandemic Treaty helps countries close legal and operational gaps before crises hit, emphasizing context-specific, sequenced planning over one-size-fits-all approaches. Dr. Rania Attia, public health expert at the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in the MENA Region and Egypt, highlighted IOM's health, border, and mobility management framework to integrate mobility into preparedness and ensure migrant-inclusive, cross-border coordination.

For more information on the Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Program (EPaPP) at GHI: <https://ghi.aub.edu.lb/epidemic-and-pandemic-preparedness-program/>

To learn more about the Certificate in Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness (CEPP): <https://ghi.aub.edu.lb/GHLAD/shop/certificate-in-epidemic-and-pandemic-preparedness/>

The full event recording is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-loihOTkAIU&feature=youtu.be>

About GHI

The Global Health Institute (GHI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) addresses global health challenges with a focus on context and sustainable impact by employing an interdisciplinary approach. GHI is structured into three divisions: The Programs Division, which

leads research, policy, and advocacy efforts; the Academy Division, which provides capacity-building initiatives for diverse populations; and the ASSIST Division, which supports community-level actors, particularly non-governmental organizations, with a range of services and resources.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 790 full-time faculty members and a student body of over 9000 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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