

National Public Health Research Dissemination Conference

Summary Report



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1 Executive Summary

The 1st Annual National Public Health Research Dissemination Conference (RDC 2025) was convened by the Public Health Institute of Malawi (PHIM) through its Research Division, in collaboration with national and international partners, from 29th to 31st October 2025 at the Bingu International Conference Centre (BICC) in Lilongwe. Held under the theme **“Advancing Public Health Research for Building Resilient and Sustainable Systems”**, the conference provided a national platform for dissemination, dialogue, and translation of public health research aligned with the National Health Research Agenda (NHRA) 2023–2030.

The conference attracted **over 400 delegates**, including policy makers, programme implementers, District Health Management Teams (DHMTs), researchers, academia, civil society, development partners, and the private sector. Through plenary sessions, oral and poster presentations, panel discussions, and networking events, RDC 2025 strengthened collaboration, promoted a One Health approach, and reinforced the role of evidence in informing policy and practice in Malawi.

2 Introduction

2.1 Public Health Institute of Malawi and National Health Research Agenda

The Public Health Institute of Malawi (PHIM), through its Research Division, is mandated to promote, coordinate, and manage public health research in Malawi under a One Health approach. This mandate is operationalized through resource mobilization, capacity building, scientific research, and knowledge management, with health research dissemination being a core function.

RDC 2025 was strategically aligned with the **National Health Research Agenda (NHRA) 2023–2030**, which prioritizes research areas critical to addressing Malawi's current and emerging health challenges. By convening researchers, policy makers, and implementers, the conference operationalized the NHRA by creating a structured platform for translating research evidence into policy-relevant knowledge and actionable interventions.

2.2 Public Health Research Dissemination Conference

2.2.1 Background, Purpose, Scope, and Objectives

The National Public Health Research Dissemination Conference was established to address persistent gaps between research generation, policy formulation, and implementation. Despite increasing volumes of locally generated evidence, limited opportunities existed for structured national-level dissemination and engagement.

The purpose of RDC 2025 was therefore to provide a **multidisciplinary, national and international platform** for sharing public health research findings, fostering dialogue, strengthening collaborations, and promoting evidence-informed decision-making. The scope of the conference covered the full spectrum of public health research, from discovery and implementation science to policy and systems research.

The specific objectives of the conference included:

- Driving positive change in public health through collaborative research and knowledge sharing
- Bringing together multidisciplinary stakeholders for inclusive health dialogue
- Promoting translation of research findings into improved policy and practice
- Bridging the knowledge gap between scientists and the general public

- Strengthening local and international research collaborations
- Promoting a One Health approach to tackling complex health challenges
- Supporting science-driven approaches to local health development in Malawi
- Encouraging innovative solutions to pressing public health problems

2.2.2 Thematic Areas

In line with the NHRA 2023–2030, RDC 2025 covered the following thematic areas:

- Emerging and endemic infectious diseases
- Non-communicable diseases
- HIV and AIDS
- Maternal, newborn, and child health
- Health systems and policy
- Social and behavioural sciences
- Neglected tropical diseases
- Trauma and emergency medicine
- Environmental health
- Sexual and reproductive health
- Mental health
- Emerging technologies in health
- Health and climate change

2.2.3 Abstracts and Scientific Sessions

A national call for abstracts was issued prior to the conference. Submissions underwent a structured peer-review process, resulting in abstracts being accepted for **oral, poster, and plenary presentations**. Scientific sessions were organized to ensure thematic coherence, methodological

rigor, and relevance to national priorities. Both early-career and senior researchers were represented, promoting mentorship and knowledge exchange.

2.2.4 Registration and Attendance

The conference registered **over 400 participants**, reflecting strong national interest and ownership. Attendance cut across government ministries and departments, research institutions, universities, development partners, non-governmental organizations, and district-level health management teams.

2.2.5 Partners, Organizers, and Financing

RDC 2025 was organized by PHIM in collaboration with multiple partners who provided financial, technical, and organizational support. Key partners included NAC and CREAMS as co-hosts, alongside, The World Bank, WHO Malawi, UNICEF, MLW, CHAI, HEPU, AFIDEP, MEIRU, Luke International, Partners in Hope, KCH, UNC Project, NCST, TRUE, NONM, and KUHeS. Their collective contributions were instrumental to the successful delivery of the conference.

2.2.6 Planning Process and Methodology

The conference was planned through a multi-committee structure, including a steering committee, scientific committee, logistics committee, and finance committee. Planning activities included stakeholder consultations, abstract solicitation and review, programme development, partner engagement, and logistical coordination. Regular planning meetings were held before and during the conference.

2.2.7 Awards

To recognize excellence and encourage high-quality research, awards were presented for outstanding oral and poster presentations, with particular attention to early-career researchers and innovative work aligned with national priorities.

2.2.8 Delegates

The conference brought together a diverse group of delegates, including:

- Policy makers and program managers from government ministries and agencies
- District Health Management Teams (DHMTs)

- Researchers and scientists
- Academia and students
- Development and implementing partners
- Civil society organizations and private sector representatives

During the **opening remarks**, the Principal Secretary in the ministry of Health and other leaders emphasized commitments to strengthen research–policy linkages, invest in local research capacity, and institutionalize the conference as a national platform. In the **closing remarks**, commitments were made to improve follow-up on conference outcomes, strengthen coordination, and ensure that research findings inform policy, programming, and practice.

3 RDC 2025 Themes

3.1 Main Conference Theme

The main theme, “**Advancing Public Health Research for Building Resilient and Sustainable Systems**,” reflected Malawi’s commitment to strengthening health systems capable of withstanding shocks such as epidemics, climate change, and socio-economic disruptions. The vision underpinning this theme was to position research as a foundational pillar for resilience, sustainability, and equity in health.

3.2 Sub-Themes and Plenary Discussions

Sub-themes aligned with the NHRA and were further explored through plenary discussions focusing on:

- Translating research into policy and practice
- Strengthening One Health approaches
- Harnessing emerging technologies for public health
- Addressing climate change and environmental determinants of health
- Building resilient health systems through implementation research

4 Takeaway Messages

- Evidence-informed decision-making is essential for resilient and sustainable health systems
- Stronger collaboration between researchers, policy makers, and implementers is critical
- The One Health approach provides a practical framework for addressing complex health challenges
- Investment in local research capacity, particularly for early-career researchers, is vital
- Effective dissemination platforms accelerate translation of research into policy and practice

5 Challenges and Lessons Learnt

5.1 Challenges

Key challenges encountered included limited early commitment by some steering committee members, communication gaps among committees, complex abstract review tools, limited reviewer availability, delays in accessing funds, logistical challenges related to poster boards, moderators, presentation consolidation, use of personal laptops, lack of innovation exhibition space, budget pressures due to fuel price fluctuations, and venue-related constraints.

5.2 Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

Key recommendations emerging from these challenges include strengthening communication through daily updates, early and structured planning, simplifying abstract review tools, establishing separate innovation exhibitions, procuring dedicated poster boards, strategic conference publicity, clear role assignment, establishing an independent conference account, early venue engagement, broader partner involvement, and inclusion of logistical support for keynote speakers in the main budget.

6 Action Points

1. Form a core group to follow up on key conference outcomes and translate findings into policy recommendations
2. Finalize and disseminate a detailed conference report to all delegates and stakeholders
3. Invest in capacity building for emerging researchers, including development of a funded capacity-building plan
4. Maintain active communication channels through quarterly meetings for collaboration and mentorship
5. Institutionalize the conference as an annual event
6. Confirm key dates for RDC 2026:
 - Conference: 28th–30th October 2026
 - Early abstract submission: opens 1st March 2026
 - Registration: 1st June–30th September 2026
 - Venue, theme, and fees to be announced

7 Conclusion

RDC 2025 marked a significant milestone in Malawi's public health research ecosystem. By convening over 400 stakeholders and aligning discussions with national priorities, the conference strengthened the foundation for evidence-informed policy and practice. Building on the lessons learnt and commitments made, RDC is well positioned to become a sustainable, annual platform that advances public health research, policy, and impact in Malawi.



8. Annexes

8.1 Organizing partners

Host Partners

- Public Health Institute of Malawi (PHIM)

Co-Host Partners

- National AIDS Commission (NAC)
- Clinical Research Education and Management Services (CREAMS)

Partner NGO's and Institutions

- UNICEF
- HEIPU
- Partner's in Hope (PIH)
- Luke International
- CHAI
- WHO
- GIZ
- NONM
- MEIRU
- MLW
- TRUE
- UNC Project Malawi
- AFIDEP
- NCST



8.2 Steering and Scientific Committee

Committee Leaders

- Dr. Bernad Mvula (Chairperson, PHIM)
- Dr. Adriano Lubanga (Co-Chair, CREAMS)
- Michael Alibi (Co-Chair, NAC)

Scientific Committee

- Memory Ngwira (PHIM) (Chair)
- Dr. Akim Bwanali (CREAMS) (Co-Chair)
- Dr. Salome Nampewo (WHO)
- Dr. Michal Waga (WHO)
- Dr. George Talama (PIH)
- Dr. Mayamiko Khomba (KCH)
- Dr. Elizabeth Sharon Nkosi (KCH)
- Dr. Patricia Kamanga (KCH)
- Faith Mtoso (PHIM)
- Alex Thawani (PHIM)
- Dr. Wezzie Kamanga (KCH)
- Nathan Singano (CREAMS)
- Alex Maseko (MLW)
- Francis Mkwenembera (UNC)
- Gracious Ali (AFIDEP)
- Colleta Magawa Zimba (NONM)
- Clement Seven (PHIM)
- Grace Charles (PHIM)
- Shadreck Sulani (NAC)
- Bertha Sato (NAC)
- James Njomvuzalema (NAC)
- Dr. John Phuka (KUHES)

- Dr. Angeziwa chunga (HEIPU)
- Dr. Nyanyiwe Mbeye (TRUE)
- Dr. Mphatso Kumupumula (KCH)
- Tracy Mponela (NAC)
- Clara Sambani (PHIM)
- Tadala K Mwale (PHIM)
- Dr. Thandie Gondwe (MEIRU)
- Khumbo Phiri (PIH)

Budget and Logistic Committee

- Billy Nyambalo (PHIM) (Chair)
- Dr. Lucky Ngwira (HEIPU) (Co-Chair)
- Peter Chalusa (WHO)
- Thomas Kaluvi (NCST)
- Timothy Tchereni (CHAI)
- Cynthia Chitule (CREAMS)
- Chikondi Chimbatata (PHIM)
- Waleke Mwabutwa (PHIM)

Media and Communications

- Gabby Gomani (UNC) (Chair)
- Watipaso Kamanga (CREAMS) (Co-Chair)
- Hamdan Saidi (PHIM)
- Moses Kamzati (PHIM)
- Moses phiri (PHIM)
- Grace Nyenzezi (NAC)
- Mercy Njolomole (PHIM)
- Bessie Phiri (PHIM)



8.3 Conference highlights

Dr. Dan Namarika

Guest of Honor – Secretary for Health

Theme: Building resilient health systems amid funding cuts



**“ Improved Health
System, Helps us all to
shine ”**

8.3 Conference highlights

Speech by the Chief of Health Services—Technical

Dr. Lillian Gondwe Chunda, Chief of Health Services-Technical (MoH)

Key Message: *Highlighted how the National Public Health Research Dissemination Conference advances **Pillar Seven of the Health Sector Strategic Plan**, reinforcing research as a national priority.*



8.3 Conference highlights

Opening Remarks

Dr. Mathews Kagoli – PHIM Director

Setting the agenda for Advancing public health research to build resilient and sustainable systems.



8.3 Conference highlights

Speech by the Chief Executive Officer, National AIDS Commission (NAC)

Dr. Beatrice Lydia Matanje, Chief Executive Officer (NAC)

Key Message: *Highlighted NAC's strategic decision to integrate its previously standalone Research Dissemination Conferences with the Public Health Institute of Malawi (PHIM), resulting in a unified national conference that strengthens collaboration and advances public health research.*



8.3 Conference highlights

Speech by the World Health Organization (WHO)
Dr. Neema Kimambo, WHO Country Representative

Theme: The Role of the World Health Organization in Strengthening Public Health in Malawi.



8.3 Conference highlights

Keynote Speech 1 by the Vice Chancellor, MUST Professor Address Mauakowa Malata

Theme: *Strengthening Health Systems through Collaboration with Learning Institutions*



“Strong health systems begin with strong institutions and empowered professionals”

8.3 Conference highlights

Keynote Speech 2 by the Head of the EDCTP Africa Office **Dr. Thomas Nyirenda**

Theme: *Strengthening Institutional Collaboration to Sustain Health Research amid Funding Constraints.*



“Partnerships are not optional; they are the new infrastructure of health research”

8.3 Conference highlights

Panel Discussion – Plenary Session **PHIM, NAC, CREAMS, HEIPU & TRUE**

Theme: *Role of NGOs in spearheading and supporting research in Malawi*

“ Non-governmental organizations remain vital bridges between research, policy, and communities ”



8.3 Conference highlights

Oral Presentations

“Emerging researchers shared evidence shaping the future of public health practice.”



8.3 Conference highlights

Poster Viewing / Gallery Walk

“A vibrant exchange of ideas through poster presentations.”



8.4 Awards and Recipients

Life time achievement award

Recipient: **Dr. Evelyn Chitsa Banda**



8.4 Awards and Recipients

Best Oral Presentation Award

Presenter: Andrew Mnkhwamba

Title: Quantification of Extended-Spectrum Beta-Lactamase-Producing *Escherichia coli* and *Klebsiella pneumoniae* in Effluent and Associated Health Implications in Blantyre, Malawi



8.4 Awards and Recipients

Best Poster Presentation Award

Presenter: Suzgika Lakudzala-Munthali

Title: *From Evidence to Policy Support: The Process of Setting Up a Rapid Response Help Desk in Malawi*



