

The Case for Achieving Healthy Lives at all Ages

A Contribution
to the Post-2015
United Nations Sustainable
Development Goals

The legacy of the Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) put the fight against poverty at the center of the international development agenda. By setting specific targets to be met by 2015, world leaders identified health as a fundamental enabler for economic development and growth. Healthier societies lead to wealthier societies by increasing productivity, socio-economic stability, and to stronger economies overall, and therefore health expenditure should be seen as an investment rather than as a cost.

The MDGs provided the impetus for increased international investment and collaboration on actionable policies to improve global health. Today, improving global health occupies a more central place in the international agenda, and encouragingly governments and the private sector are coordinating more to address global health needs. However, despite significant improvements in health outcomes, notably for infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria, the gains are fragile and any reduction in the focus on health would have disastrous consequences.

Investing for healthier societies

The next generation of development goals offers an opportunity to inject a new vision for health that recognizes health as a driver of global economic growth. In addition, the 'sustainability' of the new development goals means that they not only need to be compelling for all people, but they should also enshrine the notion of long-term investment by governments and other stakeholders, such as the private sector. Health will play a decisive role for the achievement of other development goals; to reflect this, it will be important that global health decisions in the future take a socio-economic and a 'health-in-all-policies' approach. Thus, the post-2015 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals framework presents an opportunity for global leaders to:

- Emphasize the need for sustainable long-term investments in health to address the economic and social burden of chronic and infectious diseases and encourage healthy ageing to meet health needs of future generations;
- Endorse the importance of efforts focused on prevention and wellness, not just on ill-health;
- Encourage shared and inclusive approaches, leveraging competencies of non-state actors to support implementation of universal health coverage approaches;
- Share best practices to measure progress against precise targets and achievable indicators.

Health is a global priority

Health was well represented in the MDGs (3 goals out of a total of 8). There is wide agreement among the international community to preserve a place for health in the new set of goals. An overarching health goal would provide the necessary frame for the range of policies that link health to sustainable development. Sustainability of health care would mean that the system is able to meet the health needs at all stages of a person's life, through prevention, screening, diagnosis, treatment, and care.

To achieve healthy lives at all ages, health systems should focus on long-term sustainable frameworks to prevent and manage infectious-, chronic-, and injury-related conditions. Achieving healthy lives at all ages requires the commitment to prioritize health in all policies and to involve all relevant stakeholders, including academia, civil society, and the private sector. It also requires a parallel commitment to foster an innovative eco-system in life sciences that will continue to enable the research, development and scientific partnerships that lead to new, patient-centred, medical interventions and health services.

Therefore, **achieving healthy lives at all ages** could be an appropriate way of capturing an overarching health goal and accommodating the range of related policies, targets, and indicators that will be required as part of the new development goals, and build on the momentum generated by the MDGs.