

Well-being and health promotion

Report by the Director-General

1. This report refers to resolution WHA75.19 (2022) on well-being and health promotion, which requests the Director-General to develop a global framework on well-being – building on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – and identify the role of health promotion within that framework in consultation with Member States, and decision WHA76(22) (2023) to adopt the global framework for integrating well-being into public health, utilizing a health promotion approach,¹ and to request the Director-General to report on its implementation.

PROGRESS ON WELL-BEING AND HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE POST-COVID-PANDEMIC CONTEXT

2. The universality and interconnectedness of the Sustainable Development Goals is a key aspect of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, designed in response to the growing recognition of the multiple, complex adaptive factors with a simultaneous impact on development across sectors and established silos, as well as different segments of society. The Sustainable Development Goals are interconnected and indivisible, balancing economic, social and environmental dimensions.

3. Health and well-being are also influenced by factors outside of the health sector, namely the overlapping and intersectional social, structural, economic, political, environmental and commercial determinants of health.

4. There is a growing momentum to move away from a strictly economic approach to human development towards one that also focuses on the well-being of people and the planet. Advancing a global well-being agenda contributes to the attainment of health – as defined in the Constitution of the World Health Organization.

5. Major sustainable development challenges, including those impacting health and well-being, share common underlying causes linked to:

- **economic development models** based on the mass production and consumption of goods, contributing to the rise in noncommunicable diseases, environmental degradation and a situation where profits for the few are prioritized over impacts on people and the planet;
- **inequitable distribution of resources** affecting the social, structural, economic, political, environmental and commercial determinants of health, for people and the planet;

¹ Decision WHA76(22) (2023), [https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA76/A76\(22\)-en.pdf](https://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA76/A76(22)-en.pdf).

- **fragile health and social protection systems and weakened public services**, owing to the increasing privatization of public assets and cumbersome administrative processes; outsourcing models without the requisite public stewardship to ensure service standards or equality of access, care, maintenance and investment; and insufficient accountability of governments and public administrations, increasing the health and social inequity gap;
- **digital transformation processes** that, while creating opportunities for digital health solutions in fields including education, health literacy, the community of practice, work environments and leisure activities, may potentially create an equity gap in access to health care, undermine economic empowerment, promote misinformation and have far-reaching impacts on social cohesion and trust; and
- **rapid urbanization, modernization and population growth** in complex socioeconomic, political and environmental contexts, resulting in increased threats to the well-being of individuals and societies.

GLOBAL FRAMEWORK ON WELL-BEING AND HEALTH PROMOTION

6. The framework identifies key strategic directions and brings together the most effective policy orientations drawn from the global health community and country-level experience. The six strategic directions are:

- (i) nurture planet Earth and its ecosystems;
- (ii) design social protection and welfare systems based on equity, inclusion and solidarity;
- (iii) design and support implementation for equitable economies that serve human development;
- (iv) promote equitable universal health coverage through primary health care, health promotion and preventive services;
- (v) promote equitable digital systems that serve as public utilities, contribute to social cohesion and are free of commercial interest; and
- (vi) measure and monitor well-being.

7. Currently, several Member States are experiencing social and political fluctuations, economic instability, extreme weather conditions, increasing inequities, civil unrest and a decrease in the purchasing power of households, with a direct impact on the health of individuals and communities. The current, interconnected global crises are symptoms of a broader inequality crisis. They reinforce each other, exacerbate health inequities and hinder progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. However, they also represent an opportunity for a paradigm shift to properly address under-prioritized issues such as health equity, food security, social protection, access to basic digital commodities, social isolation and climate change. Moving towards an approach based on well-being would contribute to building resilient and sustainable societies.

8. Health promotion is rooted in equitable and sustainable economic, environmental and social development, as well as a positive view of health. It highlights the need to address the upstream determinants of health and the role of individuals, communities and non-health sectors in protecting

health, preventing disease and reducing the burden of health care. Shifting to an agenda based on well-being needs to involve concrete action to rapidly address public health issues such as climate change, food insecurity, inequitable access to universal health coverage and social protection, and the negative impacts of the economic determinants of health and digital transformation. Promoting sustainable health and well-being relies on political commitments and investment in the social and commercial determinants of health, measures to protect societies against health-harming industries and measures that extend beyond the health sector.

IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING PLAN

9. The Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly also requested the Director-General to develop as part of that framework “an implementation and monitoring plan that includes identifying and supporting the translation into practice of innovative approaches for well-being using health promotion tools, new technologies and approaches to contribute to WHO’s General Programme of Work”.¹

10. The WHO’s global framework on well-being provides strategic direction and a common language. The accompanying implementation and monitoring plan adopts a well-being approach and is based on policy metrics that focus on what matters to people, as well as benefits for the planet and future generations. It aims to measure progress across the three sustainable development pillars by expanding the progress indicator framework to cover environmental and social progress/benefits, beyond economic indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP), and include a cross-cutting dimension, based on equity, inclusion and solidarity.

11. A number of countries have taken the first steps to place well-being at the centre of governance and policy development and efforts have included the development and implementation of national well-being frameworks, strategies and plans of action; the establishment of a well-being budget; and the application of new measures of progress beyond traditional GDP. In general, these aim: to foster more comprehensive, evidence-based policy-making that takes into account non-economic indicators (e.g. unpaid work, inequalities and environmental sustainability); to set national well-being objectives or outcomes; and to monitor progress. Through this approach, non-health sectors are required to indicate their contributions to promoting health, social cohesion, equity, sustainable development, and preservation of the natural eco system in a holistic manner. National initiatives include the application of the following: a “Buen Vivir” concept, a Gross National Happiness (GNH) model, a quality-of-life framework, an economy of well-being, an Ayurveda-based approach, a well-being budget and a National Strategy for Wellbeing 2031.

12. The Secretariat is currently setting up a multidisciplinary Strategic Technical Advisory Group of Experts to provide advice and propose inputs into the monitoring and implementation frameworks. The group will examine important WHO workstreams (such as those on the social determinants of health and on gender, equity and human rights), as well as the upcoming World Report on Social Determinants of Health and the World Report on Commercial Determinants of Health.²

13. The Secretariat has also created several interdisciplinary workstreams on well-being, building on the well-being economy movement, the social determinants of health, and primary health care.

¹ Resolution WHA75.19 (2022), paragraph 2(2).

² Special Initiative for Action on the Social Determinants of Health for Advancing Health Equity (<https://www.who.int/initiatives/action-on-the-social-determinants-of-health-for-advancing-equity>, accessed 12 December 2023).

14. Action to promote individual well-being has included the development of the Definition and Framework for Adolescent Well-being, which is underpinned by five interconnected domains and calls for multi-sectoral policies and programming. Building on this work and using a whole-of-life-course approach, the Secretariat launched an interdisciplinarity process to establish a definition of maternal well-being that extends beyond reproductive health, in order to ensure that women's needs take centre-stage during this profound period of change, so that they can thrive and realize their full potential and rights.

15. The joint WHO-UNICEF Helping Adolescents Thrive Initiative aims to strengthen policies and programmes on adolescent mental health, including mental health promotion. In 2021, WHO and UNICEF released a related toolkit to implement WHO guidelines on promotive and preventive mental health interventions for adolescents. The UNICEF-WHO Joint Programme on Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-being and Development of Children and Adolescents fosters interministerial coordination and the development and implementation of context-specific, multisectoral plans for children and adolescents in thirteen countries.

16. At the societal level, the WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All, established in 2020 by the Director-General, aims to reframe how health and well-being are measured, produced, and distributed across the economy. Further information on the Council is available in a separate document.¹

17. In September 2022, the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean published a technical paper on promoting health and well-being in the Eastern Mediterranean Region,² and is drawing up a regional road map for translating the global framework into action the regional and country levels.

18. In the WHO European Region, a high-level forum was held in March 2023 on health in the well-being economy. Building on this work, an initial meeting of central banks was subsequently convened with representatives from the financial and health sectors, with the aim of delivering well-being and fiscal resilience. In September 2023, a United Nations General Assembly side event brought together government representatives, economists, tax and health experts from around the world to discuss pursuing well-being, equity and healthy societies through sustainable fiscal policies.

19. In addition, WHO is contributing to broader discussions within the United Nations system on the future of social and demographic statistics, and on moving beyond GDP. These debates have touched, directly or indirectly, on the inclusion of well-being or elements thereof.

SUPPORT FOR COUNTRY EFFORTS

20. The Secretariat is currently drawing up policy briefs for each of the strategic directions, aimed at high-level decision-makers at the national level. The briefs will deal with aspects of governance, funding and mechanisms for enhancing a whole-of-government approach.

¹ WHO Council on the Economics of Health for All. Valuing Health for All: Rethinking and building a whole-of-society approach. Council brief no. 3. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/valuing-health-for-all-rethinking-and-building-a-whole-of-society-approach---the-who-council-on-the-economics-of-health-for-all---council-brief-no.-3>, accessed 14 May 2023).

² WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean. Promoting health and well-being in the Eastern Mediterranean Region: moving from theory to action to achieve the health-related Sustainable Development Goals; EM/RC69/6; Cairo: WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; 2022 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/docs/Promoting-health-well-being-EMR-eng.pdf>, accessed 18 October 2023).

21. With support from the Government of Switzerland, WHO has launched a special initiative on urban governance for health and well-being, which highlights the role of mayors in advancing a well-being agenda at the local level, through urban governance based on multisectoral cooperation and civic engagement.

22. The Secretariat is providing technical assistance to Member States in the WHO European Region relating to well-being assessments, tools to channel investments into policy interventions and approaches to increase well-being and reduce inequities, as well support for cooperation with the financial and economic sectors to integrate well-being, equity and the social determinants of health into fiscal and economic policies and resource allocation decisions. In addition, the Regional Office for Europe is fostering the exchange of knowledge and measures to improve well-being governance, budgets, laws and accountability through country-to-country policy dialogue, and launching a new initiative featuring cities as drivers of well-being economies, through the European Healthy Cities Network.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

23. The Board is invited to take note of the report. In its discussions, the Board may wish to focus on:

- How should the overall responsibility for the promotion of well-being societies be organized at the national level?
- What additional technical resources should be developed to support country implementation and monitoring?
- Given increasing calls for a shift in public health towards health promotion, what would be the best mechanisms for setting priorities to ensure well-being of societies?
- How to ensure/facilitate the commitment for cooperation for well-being and health promotion while maintaining clear responsibilities.

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