
WHO Health for All report challenges leaders to adopt new approaches to health and the economy

WHO

Millions of excess deaths globally and 100 million people pushed into poverty in 2020 alone — these are some of the devastating legacies of the COVID-19 pandemic, an avoidable catastrophe that served as a brutal wake-up call to prioritise population health. It also demonstrated that health, the planet and the economy are inextricably linked, says a bold WHO report that proposes a whole new vision.

There is an old saying that money makes the world go round. But a new World Health Organization report [Health for All: Transforming economies to deliver what matters](#) [1] demonstrates that this has been the root of all our problems, and challenges decision-makers to value and measure the things that are truly important – human and planetary health flourishing – rather than pursuing economic growth and GDP maximisation regardless of the consequences.

It is evident, the report says, that the three great crises of our time – health, inequality and the climate emergency – are profoundly interconnected, and none respects national borders. To achieve Health for All, governments must rethink value and reshape and redirect the economy based on social and planetary wellbeing, guided by new metrics and the recognition that health is a fundamental human right.

As such, a healthy population cannot be seen as ‘human capital’, as just an input or by-product of economic growth. The purpose of investing in health is not to increase GDP or economic productivity; economic activity must bring us closer to achieving human and planetary health. The authors break down the types of reforms needed to realise their vision into 13 recommendations across four interrelated pillars: Valuing health for all; Financing health for all; Innovating for health for all; and Strengthening public sector capacity.

The first pillar on ‘valuing health for all’ is based GDP providing a narrow, distorted view and the economy treating many harmful economic activities as important contributions to growth while excluding many vital activities, like women’s unpaid caregiving and the preservation of the natural environment by local and indigenous communities.

‘Financing health for all’ recognises the need for more and higher quality financing. This translates into long-term financing to create more fiscal space so lower income countries can make critical investments in health; a redesign of the international architecture of finance to fund health equitably and proactively; and a properly resourced and governed WHO so that it can play its key global coordinating role.

For example, it argues that the new [Pandemic Fund](#) [2] will succeed not only based on how much capital it raises but how it is structured and governed–“decision-making cannot ultimately revert to the biggest funders.” The report also suggests that regional development banks (RDBs) can play a more important role. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these banks became the third largest provider of development assistance after the World Bank and Global Fund.

'Innovating for health' calls for a new end-to-end health innovation ecosystem – one that prioritizes health needs from all regions of the world, including LMICs. This requires a major shift from a model where innovation is seen as led by market forces to one that rewards collective intelligence by its ability to meet public and planetary health goals. The report notes one promising example in that direction: the mRNA Vaccine Technology Transfer Programme. Set up by WHO and Geneva-based Medicines Patent Pool in 2021 in South Africa, the programme responds to the pandemic's aftermath by aiming to boost the capacity of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to produce vaccines. Following the Health for All approach, the programme's technology will be shared with about 15 other mRNA (vaccine) production sites in LMICs to decentralize and diversify manufacturing capacity, explains the report.

Finally, 'Strengthening public sector capacity' calls to re-invest in the ability of governments to drive transformative change – enabling them to implement economic policy that results in equitable health gains, addresses the social determinants of health, and responds to evolving health and social care needs. It also demands a whole-of-government approach based on transparency and meaningful engagement of citizens.

These four pillars provide the structure of the Health for All vision, which is a far cry from today's business-as-usual but well within our reach as a global community. As the report concludes, "If Health for All is the overall goal, then the economy must be repurposed to serve it."

With NCDs playing a key role in population health, providing appropriate funding for NCD prevention and treatment

can bring major gains towards achieving Health for All. Find out more in our policy brief [Invest to Protect](#) [3] and podcast [New Fund to Spark Country Action](#) [4].

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