

Health 2020: a European policy framework and strategy for the 21st century

Why Health 2020?

The 21st-century health landscape is shaped by growing global, regional, national and local interdependence and an increasingly complex array of interlinking factors that influence health and well-being. Most of today's major public health challenges, including noncommunicable diseases, antimicrobial resistance, health inequalities and the health effects of austerity measures in some countries, cannot be addressed effectively without intersectoral and coordinated action at supranational, national and local levels. The 53 countries of the WHO European Region developed and adopted Health 2020 as a common policy framework to support and encourage coordinated action by policy-makers at all levels and in all sectors to improve population health and well-being (Box 1).

Box 1. Health 2020 aim

"[Health 2020] aims to significantly improve the health and well-being of populations, reduce health inequalities, strengthen public health and ensure people-centred health systems that are universal, equitable, sustainable and of high quality."

How was it developed?

The development process comprised three parallel strands: research, dialogue and political commitment.

Research

The WHO Regional Office for Europe worked across the Region and beyond with a wide range of academic disciplines and communities of practice spanning public health, economics and social sciences to ensure that Health 2020 was solution-oriented and evidence-based. The central question was: What works in addressing today's health challenges? Commissioned studies included the review of social determinants of health and the health divide in the Region, governance approaches for the 21st century and the economics of disease prevention. The resultant vast evidence base was analysed and distilled to make Health 2020 a one-stop shop for knowledge on public policy for health in Europe and beyond.

Dialogue

An unprecedented two-year Region-wide participatory process of drafting, consultation and review engaged a broad range of stakeholders from various government sectors, nongovernmental organizations, United Nations and European Union agencies, professional associations, civil society, the mass media and public health communities at all levels of society.

Political commitment

High-level groups of scientific advisers and senior officials reviewed sequential drafts and all Member States of the Region adopted Health 2020: a European policy framework and strategy for the 21st century and its targets in Malta in September 2012.

What's new and key messages

Health 2020 is Europe's common health policy framework. It has been politically endorsed and is based on values and evidence.

The framework addresses health ministries but also aims to engage ministers and policy-makers across government and stakeholders throughout society who can contribute to health and well-being. It puts forward key policy priorities and identifies selected targets (Box 2). New compelling data on the economic benefits of disease prevention are presented. The Health 2020 process serves as an ongoing learning and exchange platform and aims to create partnerships with a unity of purpose across the Region, sharing goals and activities. An implementation strategy has been agreed and is supported by the Regional Office.

Box 2. Health 2020 targets

1. Reduce premature mortality in the European Region by 2020
2. Increase life expectancy in the European Region
3. Reduce inequalities in health in the European Region
4. Enhance the well-being of the European Region population
5. Ensure universal coverage and the right to the highest attainable level of health
6. Set national goals and targets related to health in Member States

Indicators agreed by Member States will support these targets.

What is Health 2020?

A platform for innovation

Health 2020 sets out innovative and effective ways to address today's complex public health challenges by:

- linking clinical interventions with action on equity and social determinants of health;
- strengthening health funding arrangements and enhancing governance for health;
- identifying effective and efficient ways to take advantage of new networking, partnership, communication and technological opportunities to work for health and health equity; and
- calling for health equity and well-being to be barometers of development.

A platform for partnership

The framework sets out a vision of public health as a dynamic network of stakeholders at all levels of society. It articulates a common set of values, evidence and experience:

- to provide a platform for partnership and cooperation;
- to call for cross-society engagement as a central part of health policy planning, development, implementation and monitoring at all levels; and
- to identify the value of, and mutual incentives for, co-production of health through approaches that better facilitate citizen and patient empowerment.

A platform for learning

Health 2020 calls for continual improvement of knowledge by identifying information gaps and progressing new research priorities, acknowledging, celebrating and drawing inspiration from the wide diversity of health systems and approaches across the Region. It provides policy-makers and public health advocates with a common, Region-wide open-access communication platform for sharing practical experiences of what works to improve health and reduce inequities.

A unique resource for all

Health 2020 serves as a unique resource to help policy-makers and advocates at all levels in the Region to learn from practical experiences, reset priorities and identify better ways to coordinate action among stakeholders in all sectors to improve individual and population health and well-being.

What drives Health 2020?

Health 2020 is organized around clear objectives and priority action areas (Box 3).

Box 3. Health 2020 objectives and priority health areas

Objectives

1. Improving health for all and reducing the health divide

Actions address approaches that build health into all policies to improve everyone's health, alongside targeted interventions that focus on those most at risk. Strong new health, human rights and economic arguments for improving health and addressing health inequities are presented, championing health for all and its values of the rights to health, equity, solidarity, participation and social justice.

2. Strengthen leadership and participatory governance for health

New collaborative approaches bring partners together and mobilize broad-based political and cultural support for health development. Insights are offered into new roles, opportunities and types of leadership necessary to reach out more effectively to others within and outside government to identify and implement joint solutions to major health priorities. Health 2020 identifies how citizen and patient empowerment can serve as key elements for improving health outcomes, the performance of health systems and satisfaction.

Priority health areas

Priority 1. Invest in a life-course approach and empower people

Health 2020 shows how supporting good health and its social determinants throughout the lifespan leads to increased healthy life expectancy that can yield important economic, societal and individual benefits. Children with a good start in life learn better and have more productive lives; adults with control over their lives have greater capacity for economic and social participation and to live more healthily; and healthy older people can continue to contribute actively to society. Healthy and active ageing, which starts at birth, is a policy priority and a major research priority.

Box 3. continued

Priority 2. Tackle Europe's main health challenges

Health 2020 focuses on effective integrated strategies and interventions to address the main health challenges across the Region related to noncommunicable and communicable diseases. These require determined public health action and health care system interventions. Evidence indicates the need to underpin interventions with action on equity and social determinants of health.

Priority 3. Strengthen people-centred health systems, public health capacity and emergency preparedness, surveillance and response

Strengthening health systems has been high on countries' agendas throughout the Region, with new approaches and innovations for improving health and health equity introduced. Improving delivery of public health and health care services, generating key health system inputs such as human resources and medicines of reliable quality, strengthening health funding arrangements and enhancing governance are key focus areas.

Priority 4. Creating resilient communities and supportive environments

People's health chances are closely linked to the conditions in which they are born, grow, work and age. Resilient and empowered communities respond proactively to new or adverse situations, prepare for economic, social and environmental change and cope better with crisis and hardship. Disadvantaged and disempowered communities have disproportionately poor health and social determinants outcomes. Health 2020 provides a systematic assessment of the health effects of a rapidly changing environment, particularly in the areas of technology, work, energy production and urbanization, which must be followed by action to ensure positive health benefits.

How is Health 2020 being implemented?

The Regional Office will work with Member States and partners to support the adaptation, implementation and further development of Health 2020 approaches at national levels by:

- helping to analyse public health and governance situations in countries;
- identifying country assets and needs and making recommendations for policy priorities and ways to implement and monitor impact;
- building and sustaining political and societal support to improve health by encouraging presidents, prime ministers, local communities and decision-makers across the public and private sectors to establish mechanisms for whole-of-government and whole-of-society action for health and monitor and to report on progress over time; and
- supporting capacity development and knowledge transfer on new forms of leadership, governance, engagement and communication where needed and requested.

Partnerships and ongoing dialogue must now characterize the policy implementation and review phases as countries identify best ways to adapt the framework to their own contexts. By actively informing and aligning daily practice with Health 2020 values and approaches, policy-makers and advocates can enhance the health and prosperity of individual countries and the Region as a whole to benefit all its people.

HEALTH 2020

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