



Director-General's Message

When I took office in 2007, I made clear my commitment to direct WHO's attention towards primary health care. More important than my own conviction, this reflects the widespread and growing demand for primary health care from Member States. This demand in turn displays a growing appetite among policy-makers for knowledge related to how health systems can become more equitable, inclusive and fair.

It also reflects, more fundamentally, a shift towards the need for more comprehensive thinking about the performance of the health system as a whole.

This year marks both the 60th birthday of WHO and the 30th anniversary of the Declaration of Alma-Ata on Primary

Health Care in 1978. While our global health context has changed remarkably over six decades, the values that lie at the core of the WHO Constitution and those that informed the Alma-Ata Declaration have been tested and remain true. Yet, despite enormous progress in health globally, our collective failures to deliver in line with these values are painfully obvious and deserve our greatest attention.

We see a mother suffering complications of labour without access to qualified support, a child missing out on essential vaccinations, an inner-city slum dweller living in squalor. We see the absence of protection for pedestrians alongside traffic-laden roads and highways, and the impoverishment arising from direct payment for care because of a lack of health insurance. These and many other everyday realities of life personify the unacceptable and avoidable shortfalls in the performance of our health systems.

In moving forward, it is important to learn from the past and, in looking back, it is clear that we can do better in the future. Thus, this World Health Report revisits the ambitious vision of primary health care as a set of values and principles for guiding the development of health systems. The Report represents an important opportunity to draw on the lessons of the past, consider the challenges that

lie ahead, and identify major avenues for health systems to narrow the intolerable gaps between aspiration and implementation.

These avenues are defined in the Report as four sets of reforms that reflect a convergence between the values of primary health care, the expectations of citizens and the common health performance challenges that cut across all contexts. They include:

- *universal coverage reforms* that ensure that health systems contribute to health equity, social justice and the end of exclusion, primarily by moving towards universal access and social health protection;
- *service delivery reforms* that re-organize health services around people's needs and expectations, so as to make them more socially relevant and more responsive to the changing world, while producing better outcomes;
- *public policy reforms* that secure healthier communities, by integrating public health actions with primary care, by pursuing healthy public policies across sectors and by strengthening national and transnational public health interventions; and
- *leadership reforms* that replace disproportionate reliance on command and control on one hand, and laissez-faire disengagement of the state on the other, by the inclusive, participatory, negotiation-based leadership indicated by the complexity of contemporary health systems.

While universally applicable, these reforms do not constitute a blueprint or a manifesto for action. The details required to give them life in each country must be driven by specific conditions and contexts, drawing on the best available evidence. Nevertheless, there are no reasons why any country – rich or poor – should wait to begin moving forward with these reforms. As the last three decades have demonstrated, substantial progress is possible.

Doing better in the next 30 years means that we need to invest now in our ability to bring actual performance in line with our aspirations, expectations and the rapidly changing realities of our interdependent health world. United by the common challenge of primary health care, the time is ripe, now more than ever, to foster joint learning and sharing across nations to chart the most direct course towards health for all.



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