



COMMISSION ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages

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Health is a human right and a centerpiece of sustainable development, recognized in various United Nations commitments, including the outcome of the International Conference on Population and Development held in 1994 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in 2015. Despite earlier gains, progress on many health indicators has stalled in recent years. Achieving universal access to quality healthcare, including for sexual and reproductive health, is key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The following 10 key messages draw on three reports of the Secretary General submitted as inputs to the 58th session of the Commission on Population and Development taking place from 7 to 11 April 2025 ([E/CN.9/2025/2](#); [E/CN.9/2025/3](#); [E/CN.9/2025/4](#)).

Ten key messages

1. Progress towards universal health coverage (UHC) has stalled.

Improvements in health service coverage have stagnated since 2015, and the proportion of the global population that faces catastrophic levels of out-of-pocket health spending has increased, pushing millions into poverty. Governments should increase public financial allocations for health from domestic sources, expand the availability of private insurance, and implement progressive financing for equitable access.

2. Maternal and child health gains have slowed down.

Progress in reducing maternal mortality has slowed since 2015. The maternal mortality ratio, estimated at 223 deaths per 100,000 live births globally in 2020, is still far from the SDG target of 70 per 100,000. Of 287,000 maternal deaths worldwide in 2020, 95 per cent occurred in low- and middle-income countries, with 70 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa. There have been important reductions in child mortality, yet a child born in a low-income country today is on average 13 times more likely to die before age 5 than a child born in a high-income country. Countries should expand the availability and accessibility of maternal care, skilled attendance at birth and emergency obstetric care, ensure access to nutritious foods, clean water, adequate sanitation and life-saving vaccines, and promote hygienic practices.

3. Universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare and services is critical.

Millions lack access to modern contraceptives, safe maternal care and education on human sexuality. Globally, among women of reproductive age who do not wish to become pregnant, 78 per cent are using a modern method of contraception. In sub-Saharan Africa, this proportion is only 58 per cent. In 2024, there were 12.4 million births to adolescent mothers worldwide, with sub-Saharan Africa having the highest adolescent birth rate (96.3 births per 1,000 girls and young women aged 15- 19 years). Countries should expand contraceptive access, remove legal and financial barriers, and integrate sexual and reproductive healthcare and services into national health systems.

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4. Healthy ageing requires a life-course approach.

As life expectancy rises and the older population grows larger, Governments should ensure healthy lives and promote well-being across all stages of life. By 2050, the population aged 60 years or older worldwide will nearly double to 2.1 billion, up from 1.2 billion in 2025. Investments in children, adolescents and young adults improve health outcomes throughout life and lower healthcare costs. To address the growing burden of non-communicable diseases and mental illness in ageing populations, Governments should promote healthy ageing throughout life and ensure access to long-term care.

5. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the leading global health challenge.

The most prominent causes of death are shifting from infectious diseases to NCDs, with the latter causing nearly three quarters of deaths globally in 2019, led by cardiovascular diseases, cancers, mental disorders, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. Governments should promote healthy lifestyles and behaviours, raise taxes on unhealthy products including tobacco and alcohol, and expand early screening and treatment.

6. Mental health should have higher priority.

Mental health conditions remain largely unrecognized and untreated, yet account for large portions of the disease burden in many populations. An estimated 1 in 7 adolescents and 1 in 6 older adults experience mental disorders. Governments are encouraged to integrate mental health into primary care, expand community services and invest more in the training of mental health professionals.

7. Shortages of qualified healthcare workers threaten service delivery.

Progress toward UHC is hindered by a global shortage of qualified healthcare workers, mainly in low-income countries, a deficit that is projected to grow to 10 million by 2030. There is a wide gap in sub-Saharan Africa, with only 2.3 doctors, 11.6 nurses, and 1 dentist per 10,000 people. Governments should ensure adequate investment in the education, employment and retention of health and care workers and expand community health worker programs to address these shortages.

8. Climate change is a growing health threat.

Climate change is expected to cause millions of excess deaths by 2050, especially in Africa, due to heat stress, malnutrition, malaria and diarrhea. Building a climate-resilient health system requires a collaborative and multisectoral approach that recognizes the interdependence of human and planetary health. Curbing greenhouse gas emissions and other forms of air pollution can have positive spillover effects on health. In addition, Governments should invest in climate adaptation strategies for at-risk communities.

9. Strengthening preparedness for pandemics and other crises is critical.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed weaknesses in health systems, with 18.5 million excess deaths directly or indirectly associated with the pandemic from 2020 to 2023. Enhancing the resilience of health systems in times of crisis will require strong governance, increased funding for disease surveillance and early warning systems, and mobilization of additional resources for medical research and the development of vaccines and therapeutics.

10. Digital health and data-driven decision-making can transform healthcare.

Digital technologies can improve disease tracking and healthcare access, especially in remote areas. For example, the DHIS2 (District Health Information Software 2) system, has enhanced health surveillance and preparedness in more than 70 low- and middle-income countries. Governments should invest in digital infrastructure and expand telemedicine while ensuring data privacy. More broadly, it is important to strengthen healthcare data systems, including civil registration, vital statistics and disease surveillance systems, and to develop robust models to anticipate and plan for evolving healthcare needs.



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). More work of the Population Division is available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/>.