

EDITORIAL

On the perspectives of Public Health and what IHPA can contribute to its advancement in practice

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Today's health challenges are formidable. They include patterns of behaviour leading to increased mortality and morbidity from noncommunicable diseases; the rapid spread of infectious pathogens and the potential for global pandemics; national disasters, conflicts and mass population movements; antimicrobial resistance; urbanization, and the health impacts of climate change and environmental pollution.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (1), the Health 2020 European health policy framework (2), and the European Action Plan for the Strengthening of Public Health Capacities and Services (EAP-PHS) (3) all make clear that development programmes should aim to improve health and well-being equitably. This means that government priorities, policies, and budgets should be health orientated, based on health impact assessment, and focused on sustainability.

To achieve this, governments require a national health policy that emphasizes a multisectoral approach across all their actions and the whole of society. A focus is needed on "upstream" determinants of health if better outcomes and reduced inequities are to be realised. This needs an interconnected, horizontal and networked system of governance which is open, collaborative and consensual. Public health practitioners should be able to work with complexity and to speak the language of other sectors and share their agendas.

To respond to this new environment, EAP-PHS is a main pillar of Health 2020. The *Ten Essential Public Health Operations* (EPHOs), provide a common frame for the Member States (below). They deal comprehensively with genetic, political, social and economic, environmental, commercial, cultural and health system determinants.

The Essential Public Health Operations for Europe (4)

1. Surveillance of population health and well-being
2. Monitoring and response to health hazards and emergencies
3. Health protection including environmental, occupational, food safety and others
4. Health promotion including action to address social determinants and health inequity
5. Disease prevention, including early detection of illness
6. Assuring governance for health and well-being
7. Assuring a sufficient and competent public health workforce
8. Assuring sustainable organizational structures and financing
9. Advocacy, communication and social mobilization for health
10. Advancing public health research to inform policy and practice

Today's public health practice needs to tackle inequalities, promote equity in health, and work across sectors. Modern public health needs to work in a horizontal and distributed way, identifying matters of public health concern which are ever changing. In particular, the European public health workforce needs substantial development in capacities and skills. While much progress has been made in countries with the implementation of the EAP-PHS and the EPHOs, facilitated by the WHO European Regional Office, the full potential of public health strengthening has certainly not yet been realised.

With this in mind, in 2014 the International Health Partnerships' Association, (IHPA – www.ihpa.eu), was established to aim for a worldwide society where everyone lives in healthy

communities and the benefit of good health is equally accessible to all. The IHPA and its members are driven by this view of public health, using their expertise to promote and protect health and well-being, preventing ill-health and prolonging life, through the organized efforts of societies, of professionals, leaders and community-based groups. The IHPA members believe those who have the least deserve our best; hence it has a stubborn insistence that tomorrow's world must be better than today's.

IHPA is committed to acknowledging diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Association believes in the need for health improvement through the reduction of inequalities and inequities in health, better housing and access to employment. It understands the underlying causes of disparity and the way those factors influence all of us, as well as the communities we serve. It recognizes the role of the state, and the underlying socio-economic and wider determinants of health and disease. It has a deep understanding of the responsibility of individuals in their lifestyle choices, and the need for population surveillance and monitoring of specific diseases and risk factors.

There have been many resounding statements and manifesto pledges – and broken promises. IHPA aims to give those pledges reality by achieving change for the public good. At the strategic level, IHPA advises public and private healthcare companies, government and international organizations about their business plans, strategies and policies. IHPA also works at local levels, where it believes that important improvements may often best be made. Our work is centred on evidence, health intelligence and evaluation which we use to understand and promote better health and better value health care.

IHPA, a non-governmental organization, works with governments and others to promote the right to health for all, to strengthen health systems and develop strategies that promote health, prevent disease and encourage healthy lifestyles. It seeks international contacts, partnerships with other organizations, assists its members and performs and supports research and development in its field.

Since its onset, the IHPA has placed all its capacities and services in support of European countries by working with and for the WHO Regional Office for Europe on public health services, prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases, health promotion, and migration. IHPA has also worked with and for the SEE Health Network, a multi-governmental platform and organization of nine countries in South East Europe. The efforts of the SEE Governments and health sectors will be supported by the IHPA which has a wealth of capacities needed to support countries at national, community and grass-roots levels.

On 1st-2nd April 2017, the Ministers of the SEE Health Network and their international partners held their 4th Ministerial Forum in Chisinau, the Republic of Moldova (v). As a result, the fourth Ministerial Pledge was adopted, committing the nine countries to cooperate and work jointly towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 of the United Nations, by implementing the newest European and global policies and best practices.

Implementing the policies to achieve the SDGs 2030 requires strong health systems and public health services. IHPA will join forces with the national public health and other health institutions as it is only through networking and learning from each other that practical results will be achieved.

Conflicts of interest: None.

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