



World Conference on Social Determinants of Health

RIO DE JANEIRO | BRAZIL | 19–21 OCTOBER 2011



Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 21 October 2011

1. Invited by the World Health Organization, we, Heads of Government, Ministers and government representatives came together on the 21st day of October 2011 in Rio de Janeiro to express our determination to achieve social and health equity through action on social determinants of health and well-being by a comprehensive intersectoral approach.
2. We understand that health equity is a shared responsibility and requires the engagement of all sectors of government, of all segments of society, and of all members of the international community, in an "all for equity" and "health for all" global action.
3. We underscore the principles and provisions set out in the World Health Organization Constitution and in the 1978 Declaration of Alma-Ata as well as in the 1986 Ottawa Charter and in the series of international health promotion conferences, which reaffirmed the essential value of equity in health and recognized that "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition". We recognize that governments have a responsibility for the health of their peoples, which can be fulfilled only by the provision of adequate health and social measures and that national efforts need to be supported by an enabling international environment.
4. We reaffirm that health inequities within and between countries are politically, socially and economically unacceptable, as well as unfair and largely avoidable, and that the promotion of health equity is essential to sustainable development and to a better quality of life and well-being for all, which in turn can contribute to peace and security.
5. We reiterate our determination to take action on social determinants of health as collectively agreed by the World Health Assembly and reflected in resolution WHA62.14 ("Reducing health inequities through action on the social determinants of health"), which notes the three overarching recommendations of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health: to improve daily living conditions; to tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money and resources; and to measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action.

6. Health inequities arise from the societal conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, referred to as social determinants of health. These include early years' experiences, education, economic status, employment and decent work, housing and environment, and effective systems of preventing and treating ill health. We are convinced that action on these determinants, both for vulnerable groups and the entire population, is essential to create inclusive, equitable, economically productive and healthy societies. Positioning human health and well-being as one of the key features of what constitutes a successful, inclusive and fair society in the 21st century is consistent with our commitment to human rights at national and international levels.

7. Good health requires a universal, comprehensive, equitable, effective, responsive and accessible quality health system. But it is also dependent on the involvement of and dialogue with other sectors and actors, as their performance has significant health impacts. Collaboration in coordinated and intersectoral policy actions has proven to be effective. Health in All Policies, together with intersectoral cooperation and action, is one promising approach to enhance accountability in other sectors for health, as well as the promotion of health equity and more inclusive and productive societies. As collective goals, good health and well-being for all should be given high priority at local, national, regional and international levels.

8. We recognize that we need to do more to accelerate progress in addressing the unequal distribution of health resources as well as conditions damaging to health at all levels. Based on the experiences shared at this Conference, we express our political will to make health equity a national, regional and global goal and to address current challenges, such as eradicating hunger and poverty, ensuring food and nutritional security, access to safe drinking water and sanitation, employment and decent work and social protection, protecting environments and delivering equitable economic growth, through resolute action on social determinants of health across all sectors and at all levels. We also acknowledge that by addressing social determinants we can contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

9. The current global economic and financial crisis urgently requires the adoption of actions to reduce increasing health inequities and prevent worsening of living conditions and the deterioration of universal health care and social protection systems.

10. We acknowledge that action on social determinants of health is called for both within countries and at the global level. We underscore that increasing the ability of global actors, through better global governance, promotion of international cooperation and development, participation in policy-making and monitoring progress, is essential to contribute to national and local efforts on social determinants of health. Action on social determinants of health should be adapted to the national and sub-national contexts of individual countries and regions to take into account different social, cultural and economic systems. Evidence from research and experiences in implementing policies on social determinants of health, however, shows common features of successful action. There are five key action areas critical to addressing health inequities: (i) to adopt better governance for health and development; (ii) promote participation in policy-making and implementation; (iii) to further reorient the health sector towards reducing health inequities; (iv) to strengthen global governance and collaboration; and (v) to monitor progress and increase accountability. Action on social determinants of health therefore means that we, the representatives of Governments, will strive individually and collectively to develop and support policies, strategies, programmes and action plans, which address social determinants of health, with the support of the international community, that include:

11. *To adopt better governance for health and development*

11.1 Acknowledging that governance to address social determinants involves transparent and inclusive decision-making processes that give voice to all groups and sectors involved, and develop policies that perform effectively and reach clear and measurable outcomes, build accountability, and, most crucially, are fair in both policy development processes and results;

11.2 We pledge to:

- (i) Work across different sectors and levels of government, including through, as appropriate, national development strategies, taking into account their contribution to health and health equity and recognizing the leading role of health ministries for advocacy in this regard;
- (ii) Develop policies that are inclusive and take account of the needs of the entire population with specific attention to vulnerable groups and high-risk areas;
- (iii) Support comprehensive programmes of research and surveys to inform policy and action;
- (iv) Promote awareness, consideration and increased accountability of policy-makers for impacts of all policies on health;
- (v) Develop approaches, including effective partnerships, to engage other sectors in order to identify individual and joint roles for improvements in health and reduction of health inequities;
- (vi) Support all sectors in the development of tools and capacities to address social determinants of health at national and international levels;
- (vii) Foster collaboration with the private sector, safeguarding against conflict of interests, to contribute to achieving health through policies and actions on social determinants of health;
- (viii) Implement resolution WHA62.14, which takes note of the recommendations of the final report of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health;
- (ix) Strengthen occupational health safety and health protection and their oversight and encourage the public and private sectors to offer healthy working conditions so as to contribute to promoting health for all;
- (x) Promote and strengthen universal access to social services and social protection floors;
- (xi) Give special attention to gender-related aspects as well as early child development in public policies and social and health services;
- (xii) Promote access to affordable, safe, efficacious and quality medicines, including through the full implementation of the WHO Global Strategy and Plan of Action on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property;
- (xiii) Strengthen international cooperation with a view to promoting health equity in all countries through facilitating transfer on mutually agreed terms of expertise, technologies and scientific data in the field of social determinants of health, as well as exchange of good practices for managing intersectoral policy development.

12. *To promote participation in policy-making and implementation*

12.1 Acknowledging the importance of participatory processes in policy-making and implementation for effective governance to act on social determinants of health;

12.2 We pledge to:

- (i) Promote and enhance inclusive and transparent decision-making, implementation and accountability for health and health governance at all levels, including through enhancing access to information, access to justice and public participation;
- (ii) Empower the role of communities and strengthen civil society contribution to policy-making and implementation by adopting measures to enable their effective participation for the public interest in decision-making;
- (iii) Promote inclusive and transparent governance approaches, which engage early with affected sectors at all levels of governments, as well as support social participation and involve civil society and the private sector, safeguarding against conflict of interests;
- (iv) Consider the particular social determinants resulting in persistent health inequities for indigenous people, in the spirit of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and their specific needs and promote meaningful collaboration with them in the development and delivery of related policies and programmes;
- (v) Consider the contributions and capacities of civil society to take action in advocacy, social mobilization and implementation on social determinants of health;
- (vi) Promote health equity in all countries particularly through the exchange of good practices regarding increased participation in policy development and implementation;
- (vii) Promote the full and effective participation of developed and developing countries in the formulation and implementation of policies and measures to address social determinants of health at the international level.

13. *To further reorient the health sector towards reducing health inequities*

13.1 Acknowledging that accessibility, availability, acceptability, affordability and quality of health care and public health services are essential to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, one of the fundamental rights of every human being, and that the health sector should firmly act to reduce health inequities;

13.2 We pledge to:

- (i) Maintain and develop effective public health policies which address the social, economic, environmental and behavioural determinants of health with a particular focus on reducing health inequities;
- (ii) Strengthen health systems towards the provision of equitable universal coverage and promote access to high quality, promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative health services throughout the life-cycle, with a particular focus on comprehensive and integrated primary health care;
- (iii) Build, strengthen and maintain public health capacity, including capacity for intersectoral action, on social determinants of health;
- (iv) Build, strengthen and maintain health financing and risk pooling systems that prevent people from becoming impoverished when they seek medical treatment;
- (v) Promote mechanisms for supporting and strengthening community initiatives for health financing and risk pooling systems;

- (vi) Promote changes within the health sector, as appropriate, to provide the capacities and tools to act to reduce health inequities including through collaborative action;
- (vii) Integrate equity, as a priority within health systems, as well as in the design and delivery of health services and public health programmes;
- (viii) Reach out and work across and within all levels and sectors of government by promoting mechanisms for dialogue, problem-solving and health impact assessment with an equity focus to identify and promote policies, programmes, practices and legislative measures that may be instrumental for the goal pursued by this Political Declaration and to adapt or reform those harmful to health and health equity;
- (ix) Exchange good practices and successful experiences with regard to policies, strategies and measures to further reorient the health sector towards reducing health inequities.

14. *To strengthen global governance and collaboration*

14.1 Acknowledging the importance of international cooperation and solidarity for the equitable benefit of all people and the important role the multilateral organizations have in articulating norms and guidelines and identifying good practices for supporting actions on social determinants, and in facilitating access to financial resources and technical cooperation, as well as in reviewing and, where appropriate, strategically modifying policies and practices that have a negative impact on people's health and well-being;

14.2 We pledge to:

- (i) Adopt coherent policy approaches that are based on the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, taking into account the right to development as referred to, inter alia, by the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, that will strengthen the focus on social determinants of health, towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals;
- (ii) Support social protection floors as defined by countries to address their specific needs and the ongoing work on social protection within the United Nations system, including the work of the International Labour Organization;
- (iii) Support national governments, international organizations, nongovernmental entities and others to tackle social determinants of health as well as to strive to ensure that efforts to advance international development goals and objectives to improve health equity are mutually supportive;
- (iv) Accelerate the implementation by the State Parties of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), recognizing the full range of measures including measures to reduce consumption and availability, and encourage countries that have not yet done so to consider acceding to the FCTC as we recognize that substantially reducing tobacco consumption is an important contribution to addressing social determinants of health and vice versa;
- (v) Take forward the actions set out in the political declaration of the United Nations General Assembly High-Level Meeting on the Prevention and Control Noncommunicable Diseases at local, national and international levels – ensuring a focus on reducing health inequities;
- (vi) Support the leading role of the World Health Organization in global health governance, and in promoting alignment in policies, plans and activities on social determinants of health with its partner United Nations agencies, development banks and other key international organizations, including in joint advocacy, and in facilitating access to the provision of financial and technical assistance to countries and regions;

- (vii) Support the efforts of governments to promote capacity and establish incentives to create a sustainable workforce in health and in other fields, especially in areas of greatest need;
- (viii) Build capacity of national governments to address social determinants of health by facilitating expertise and access to resources through appropriate United Nations agencies' support, particularly the World Health Organization;
- (ix) Foster North-South and South-South cooperation in showcasing initiatives, building capacity and facilitating the transfer of technology on mutually agreed terms for integrated action on health inequities, in line with national priorities and needs, including on health services and pharmaceutical production, as appropriate.

15. *To monitor progress and increase accountability*

15.1 Acknowledging that monitoring of trends in health inequities and of impacts of actions to tackle them is critical to achieving meaningful progress, that information systems should facilitate the establishment of relationships between health outcomes and social stratification variables and that accountability mechanisms to guide policy-making in all sectors are essential, taking into account different national contexts;

15.2 We pledge to:

- (i) Establish, strengthen and maintain monitoring systems that provide disaggregated data to assess inequities in health outcomes as well as in allocations and use of resources;
- (ii) Develop and implement robust, evidence-based, reliable measures of societal well-being, building where possible on existing indicators, standards and programmes and across the social gradient, that go beyond economic growth;
- (iii) To promote research on the relationships between social determinants and health equity outcomes with a particular focus on evaluation of effectiveness of interventions;
- (iv) Systematically share relevant evidence and trends among different sectors to inform policy and action;
- (v) Improve access to the results of monitoring and research for all sectors in society;
- (vi) Assess the impacts of policies on health and other societal goals, and take these into account in policy-making;
- (vii) Use intersectoral mechanisms such as a Health in All Policies approach for addressing inequities and social determinants of health; enhance access to justice and ensure accountability, which can be followed up;
- (viii) Support the leading role of the World Health Organization in its collaboration with other United Nations agencies in strengthening the monitoring of progress in the field of social determinants of health and in providing guidance and support to Member States in implementing a Health in All Policies approach to tackling inequities in health;
- (ix) Support the World Health Organization on the follow-up to the recommendations of the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health;

- (x) Promote appropriate monitoring systems that take into consideration the role of all relevant stakeholders including civil society, nongovernmental organizations as well as the private sector, with appropriate safeguard against conflict of interests, in the monitoring and evaluation process;
- (xi) Promote health equity in and among countries, monitoring progress at the international level and increasing collective accountability in the field of social determinants of health, particularly through the exchange of good practices in this field;
- (xii) Improve universal access to and use of inclusive information technologies and innovation in key social determinants of health.

16. *Call for global action*

16.1 We, Heads of Government, Ministers and government representatives, solemnly reaffirm our resolve to take action on social determinants of health to create vibrant, inclusive, equitable, economically productive and healthy societies, and to overcome national, regional and global challenges to sustainable development. We offer our solid support for these common objectives and our determination to achieve them.

16.2 We call upon the World Health Organization, United Nations agencies and other international organizations to advocate for, coordinate and collaborate with us in the implementation of these actions. We recognize that global action on social determinants will need increased capacity and knowledge within the World Health Organization and other multilateral organizations for the development and sharing of norms, standards and good practices. Our common values and responsibilities towards humanity move us to fulfil our pledge to act on social determinants of health. We firmly believe that doing so is not only a moral and a human rights imperative but also indispensable to promote human well-being, peace, prosperity and sustainable development. We call upon the international community to support developing countries in the implementation of these actions through the exchange of best practices, the provision of technical assistance and in facilitating access to financial resources, while reaffirming the provisions of the United Nations Millennium Declaration as well as the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development.

16.3 We urge those developed countries which have pledged to achieve the target of 0.7 percent of GNP for official development assistance by 2015, and those developed countries that have not yet done so, to make additional concrete efforts to fulfil their commitments in this regard. We also urge developing countries to build on progress achieved in ensuring that official development assistance is used effectively to help achieve development goals and targets.

16.4 World leaders will soon gather again here in Rio de Janeiro to consider how to meet the challenge of sustainable development laid down twenty years ago. This Political Declaration recognizes the important policies needed to achieve both sustainable development and health equity through acting on social determinants.

16.5 We recommend that the social determinants approach is duly considered in the ongoing reform process of the World Health Organization. We also recommend that the 65th World Health Assembly adopts a resolution endorsing this Political Declaration.