International Classification of Diseases (ICD)

Key facts

- The ICD is the global health information standard for mortality and morbidity statistics.
- ICD is increasingly used in clinical care and research to define diseases and study disease patterns, as well as manage health care, monitor outcomes and allocate resources.
- More than 100 countries use the system to report mortality data, a primary indicator of health status. This system helps to monitor death and disease rates worldwide and measure progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.
- About 70% of the world’s health expenditures (USD $ 3.5 billion) are allocated using ICD for reimbursement and resource allocation.
- ICD has been translated into 43 languages.
- The 11th revision process is underway and the final ICD-11 will be released in 2015.

ICD purpose and uses

The ICD is the foundation for the identification of health trends and statistics globally. It is the international standard for defining and reporting diseases and health conditions. It allows the world to compare and share health information using a common language.

The ICD defines the universe of diseases, disorders, injuries and other related health conditions. These entities are listed in a comprehensive way so that everything is covered. It organizes information into standard groupings of diseases, which allows for:

- easy storage, retrieval and analysis of health information for evidenced-based decision-making;
- sharing and comparing health information between hospitals, regions, settings and countries; and
- data comparisons in the same location across different time periods.

It is the diagnostic classification standard for all clinical and research purposes. These include monitoring of the incidence and prevalence of diseases, observing reimbursements and resource allocation trends, and keeping track of safety and quality guidelines.

ICD allows the counting of deaths as well as diseases, injuries, symptoms, reasons for encounter, factors that influence health status, and external causes of disease.
Primary users

Users include physicians, nurses, health workers, researchers, health information managers, policy-makers, insurers and national health programme managers, among others.

History

The first international classification edition, known as the International List of Causes of Death, was adopted by the International Statistical Institute in 1893.

The ICD has been revised and published in a series of editions to reflect advances in health and medical science over time.

WHO was entrusted with the ICD at its creation in 1948 and published the 6th version, ICD-6, that incorporated morbidity for the first time. The WHO Nomenclature Regulations, adopted in 1967, stipulated that Member States use the most current ICD revision for mortality and morbidity statistics.

ICD-10 was endorsed in May 1990 by the Forty-third World Health Assembly. It is cited in more than 20,000 scientific articles and used by more than 100 countries around the world (117).

ICD-11 revision underway

The 11th version, ICD-11, is now being prepared. The development phase will continue for three years and ICD-11 will be finalized in 2015.

For the first time, through advances in information technology, public health users, stakeholders and others interested can provide input to the beta version of ICD-11 using an online revision process. Peer-reviewed comments and input will be added through the revision period. When finalized, ICD-11 will be ready to use with electronic health records and information systems.

WHO encourages broad participation in the 11th revision so that the final classification meets the needs of health information users and is more comprehensive (see the link below to participate in the revision).

Related links

More about ICD-11
Frequently asked questions about the ICD-11 revision
Register to participate in ICD-11