The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development heralds a new era for global public health, offering the opportunity to strive for a global development agenda of unprecedented scope and ambition.

WHO: moving forward on the SDGs

WHO’s Constitution calls for “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” reflecting the ideals of SDG 3 “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages”.

WHO’s programme budget for 2016-2017 contains a range of activities specifically related to advancing the SDGs, including:

• moving towards universal coverage
• enhancing efforts to improve reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health
• accelerating progress towards elimination of malaria
• expanding our work on prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases
• promoting good health at key stages of life, taking into account the need to address health equity, social determinants of health and human rights, with a focus on gender equality
• working with other sectors that impact health including:
  ~ environmental and occupational health trends
  ~ access to water and sanitation
  ~ access to sustainable and modern energy
  ~ promotion of decent work and a safe work environment
  ~ making cities and human settlements cleaner, safer and more sustainable
  ~ action to tackle climate change and its impacts
  ~ death and illness from environmental pollution.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are relevant to all countries worldwide. While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set a limited number of human development targets for poverty eradication, health, education, food security and nutrition, the SDGs go much further and ask much more from the world’s countries.

The new agenda integrates all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental) around people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. It recognizes that so many of the development goals impact one another and are interrelated and interdependent.

While some have questioned the breadth and ambition of the SDGs, others acknowledge that the range of topics more closely reflects the real issues that governments have to deal with than the narrow agenda of the MDGs did.

Health has a central place as a major contributor and beneficiary of sustainable development policies.

Almost every one of the 17 new goals is directly related to the health of the world’s people or will contribute to health indirectly. The specific health targets are no longer focused just on saving lives in poor countries, but in creating healthier societies and promoting wellbeing for everyone worldwide.

The SDGs recognize the importance of equity – we must address the needs of women, children, and the poorest, most disadvantaged groups to achieve true sustainable development.

In November 2015, the World Health Organization will launch Health in 2015: from MDGs to SDGs. This report looks back 15 years at the trends and positive forces during the MDG era and assesses the main challenges that will affect health in the coming 15 years.

About WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) is building a better future for people all over the world. We are committed to helping countries address ongoing public health issues and health emergencies, recommending solutions to ensure that health becomes a positive force for all the world’s peoples of present and future generations. To do so, we work with countries to reduce premature deaths from disease and ensure the safety of the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink and the medicines and vaccines that treat and protect us.

Our work aims to provide every child, woman and man with the best chance to lead a healthier, longer life.

Working through offices in 150 countries, six regional hubs and headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, our organization keeps a close eye on health trends, looking out for new threats and for new opportunities. We gather the world’s top technical experts to examine critical issues, define the best solutions and deliver the strongest guidelines. We then mobilize governments, health workers and partners to apply this evidence to make the right decisions and bring better health for all.

As the lead health authority within the United Nations system, WHO strives for a world where everyone has an opportunity to attain his or her potential for the best possible health.
MDGs: achievements on health at a glance

HIV, tuberculosis and malaria targets (failing and reversing the global epidemic) have been met.

Child mortality decreased by 53% – a great achievement, but falling short of the 67% target.

Deaths related to pregnancy and childbirth (maternal mortality) have fallen by more than 40%, impressing but short of the 75% target.

The target for drinking water has been met, with 91% of the global population using an improved drinking water source, compared to 78% in 1990.

Between 1990 and 2015, the global prevalence of underweight among children aged less than 5 declined from 25% to 14%, nearly reaching the target of a 50% reduction.

The SDGs and health

At first glance it could appear that health has a less central role in the SDGs than the MDGs: just one out of 17 goals sets specific targets for health. However, this single health goal “Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages” is broad, underpinned by 13 targets that cover a wide spectrum of the work that WHO does.

Furthermore, as a major contributor and beneficiary of sustainable development policies, health cuts across many of the other 16 goals and thus retains a central position across the entire SDG framework.

Health is positioned by the SDGs as a key feature of human development in a more integrated manner than was the case for the MDGs. Social, environmental and economic determinants, such as education, income and urbanization, have an impact on health and, in turn, benefit from a healthy population.

The world faces new and growing challenges that have profound implications for health, including rising inequalities within and between states; profound demographic and epidemiological changes; spiraling conflict, violence and extremism; increased migratory flows; the depletion of natural resources; the adverse impacts of environmental degradation; and the prospect of irreversible climate change.

Trends, determinants and risks that impact health include:

- Population trends, including fertility decline and population growth, changing population structure and age, migration and urbanization
- Economic and development trends, including poverty eradication and equity, globalization and trade, and financing for development
- Social determinants such as gender, education and income
- Human rights and equity, violence against women
- Technological development
- Environmental determinants and risks, including climate change
- Disease outbreaks, natural disasters, conflicts and other humanitarian crises

The SDGs were developed in recognition that eradicating poverty and inequality, creating inclusive economic growth and preserving the planet are inextricably linked, not only to each other but also to population health; and that the relationships between each of these elements are dynamic and reciprocal. They continue to prioritize the fight against poverty and hunger, while also focusing on human rights for all and the empowerment of women and girls. The SDGs recognize the vital role that women play in social and economic development and reaffirm the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development.

While the SDGs include the “unfinished business” of the MDG era, they also address a major shift in health patterns that accelerated during the MDG period. Improvements in economic and social conditions in many developing countries, along with poverty reduction, nutrition improvements and substantial progress on preventing and treating communicable diseases, has resulted in a substantial shift in the major causes of death and illness globally. The demographic transition – people are living longer and having fewer children – along with the associated transition from communicable diseases, maternal and perinatal conditions, and nutritional deficiencies to noncommunicable diseases and injury, has progressed substantially in many developing countries.

Infectious diseases and malnutrition used to be the world’s biggest killers. Now noncommunicable diseases, which include heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung disease, represent the major killers in most countries.

The health targets of the SDGs embrace bold new goals for turning the tide on noncommunicable diseases. They also specifically address the toll of injuries and determinants of health such as increasing urbanization, pollution and climate change.

Important health issues that were not addressed in the MDGs and now have targets in the SDGs include mental health, substance abuse, health impact from hazardous chemicals, water and soil pollution and contamination and the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. An additional target addresses reducing and managing national and global health risks, for example, from contagious diseases.

Universal health coverage provides an overall framework for the implementation of a broad and ambitious agenda in all countries. This is the only target that cuts across all of the health goals, addressing linkages with health-related targets in the other goals. Health reflects the SDG’s strong focus on equity and the importance of addressing the needs of poor or disadvantaged groups wherever they may live.

Barely mentioned in the MDGs, health security plays a key role in the 2030 agenda, which recognizes the vital role that women play in social and economic development and reaffirm the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development.

The goals within a goal: Health targets for SDG 3

**Goal 3.** Health target

| **3.1** | By 2020, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births |
| **3.2** | By 2020, end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of age, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births |
| **3.3** | By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases |
| **3.4** | By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being |
| **3.5** | Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol |
| **3.6** | By 2020, have the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents |
| **3.7** | By 2020, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategic and programmes |
| **3.8** | Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all |
| **3.9** | By 2030, substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution and contamination |
| **3.10** | Strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate |
| **3.11** | Support the research and development of vaccines and medicines for the communicable and non-communicable diseases that primarily affect developing countries, provide access to affordable essential medicines and vaccines, in accordance with the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health, which affirms the right of developing countries to use the full the provisions in the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights regarding flexibilities to protect public health, and, in particular, provide access to medicines for all |
| **3.12** | Substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least developed countries and small island developing States |
| **3.13** | Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, surveillance and trade, and financing for development |

**Other SDG targets that directly impact health**

- Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other forms of exploitation
- Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
- End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
- By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round
- By 2030, end all forms of discrimination in all areas, including violence against women and girls, and prevent and combat all forms of violence against all women and girls
- By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations...