

## World Health Day as a platform for action

### Urban Health Matters

The theme of urbanization and health was selected for World Health Day in recognition of the effect urbanization has on our collective health globally and for us all individually. Urban areas provide great opportunities for individuals and families to prosper and can provide a healthy living environment. However, urbanization can also bring many challenges including: overcrowding; air pollution; rising levels of risk factors like tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and the harmful use of alcohol; road traffic injuries; inadequate infrastructure, transport facilities, solid waste management systems; and insufficient access to health facilities in slum areas.

We are at a clear turning point as we are moving towards an increasingly urbanized world and with it, the need to embrace the consequences this can have on health – both the benefits and the challenges. We can take action now to ensure growing cities are healthy ones.

### An overarching goal for World Health Day

One of the overarching goals for World Health Day on 7 April 2010 is to integrate activities initiated on the Day into a sustained public health strategy through a series of activities, either at the street, neighborhood, local, regional or national level. The Day should serve as a start or a symbol of a sustained commitment to incorporate health more broadly in urban public policy. The Day can trigger the long-term commitment to approach health from a social determinants point of view – addressing the factors and conditions that can determine our health outcomes – across multiple sectors engaging a wide array of partners including civil society and residents.

### A campaign to unite cities

**1000 cities, 1000 lives.** Cities are encouraged to work across multiple agencies with a wide range of partners to have the most lasting impact on health. The global goal is for **1000 cities** to participate in the World Health Day campaign theme.

A practical way for cities to take part is to open up public spaces to health activities and close off portions of streets to motorized traffic, enabling physical activity for one day from 7 to 11 April. Other activities such as town hall meetings with mayors, clean-up campaigns, and promoting community solidarity by encouraging residents to visit neighbours, orphanages, and patients in hospitals are also welcomed. What is done on World Health Day is up to the creativity, desires, and priorities of each city.

To meet the goal of **1000 lives**, residents will be asked to give examples of urban health heroes who have made a significant impact on health in their cities. These stories are uploaded as videos on the social media website of the campaign.

### Key messages for WHD 2010:

- Virtually all population growth over the next 30 years will be in urban areas.
- The urban poor suffer disproportionately from a wide range of diseases and health problems.
- The major drivers of health in urban settings are beyond the health sector.
- Actions and solutions exist to tackle the root causes of urban health challenges.
- Build partnerships with multiple sectors of society to make cities healthier.

### Some facts and trends on urbanization\*

- The rate at which urbanization has taken place over the last few decades is well-illustrated by a look at how long it took a city to grow from one million to eight million inhabitants. For London, this growth took around 130 years. For Bangkok, similar growth took 45 years. For Seoul, it took only 25 years.
- Most rapid growth will take place in cities of 1 to 10 million people.
- One in three urban dwellers live in slums, or a total of one billion people worldwide.

\* See *Toolkit for Event Organizers (pages 10-14)* for more details on facts and trends, available on WHO website: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

## Actions to build a healthy and safe urban environment:

We are at a clear turning point as we are moving towards an increasingly urbanized world. We need to appreciate the positive and negative impact of urbanization on health and take appropriate actions to address them. There is a pressing need for action to ensure that growing cities are healthy cities.

WHO recommends the following **five calls to action** to build a healthy and safe urban environment:

- ✓ **Promote urban planning for healthy behaviours and safety.** Local governments and civil society can design urban areas to: promote physical activity through investment in public transport; encourage healthy eating; improve the availability of and access to food; and reduce violence and crime through good environmental design and regulatory controls, including control of the number of alcohol outlets.
- ✓ **Improve urban living conditions.** Apply healthy urban design principles with easy access to basic amenities and services, designated commercial and non-commercial land use, with land also set aside for protection of natural resources and recreation. One of the biggest challenges is, of course, access to adequate shelter for all. The quality of housing and adequate services such as water and sanitation are vital contributors to health.
- ✓ **Ensure participatory urban governance.** Local participatory governance mechanisms should be established to enable and encourage communities and local governments to partner in building healthier and safer cities.
- ✓ **Build inclusive cities that are accessible and age-friendly.** People with disabilities make up at least 10% of the population, and access barriers prevent participation in education, employment and public life. Globally, populations are rapidly ageing, many of whom will experience mobility and sensory impairments. Measures such as accessible

public transport, kerb cuts, safe pedestrian crossings (e.g. tactile paving, signaled controlled crossings) all improve safety and enhance participation for disabled and older persons.

- ✓ **Make urban areas resilient to emergencies and disasters.** Improving the ability of the community to protect itself from known hazards, and involving the health sector in community-led local emergency response planning and training, will help to reduce risks and provide a more effective emergency response. The development of settlements and infrastructure away from natural and technological hazard-prone areas, and safer health facilities prepared for emergencies will make communities safer. Multi-hazard health emergency management systems, with the ability to provide safe and secure health services, food and water, and protection and shelter in humanitarian settings are needed to minimize loss of life and disabilities in emergencies, disasters and other crises.

## Benefits for cities joining the campaign:

- “Health issues” are some of the biggest concerns among residents, and organizing a healthy and fun event can make a lasting impression on people.
- Promotion of the city’s reputation, which can lead to better opportunities for co-sponsorship, soliciting guests, getting celebrities on board, and attracting more support in general.
- Compared to events that are organized solely by the city, organizing an event with an international organization will give residents a higher-level and more global point of view about health issues, and provide a learning opportunity.
- Increased inter-sectoral collaboration, and higher morale among inhabitants and government officials alike. Opportunity for new networks to form.
- Engaging the community through volunteerism provides students, youth and retired people an opportunity to enjoy fuller participation in society.



**Expected outcomes:**

Leaders make cost-effective, sustainable, pro-health policy involving other sectors such as transport, education, water and sanitation, and involve communities in shaping these decisions. More specifically:

1. City dwellers, city planners and authorities understand that living in cities poses health challenges and that good urban planning can address these challenges.
2. Urban living conditions are improved and access to basic services and amenities as well as recreational facilities is established.
3. Residents adopt healthy behaviors for city living and participate in shaping policy decisions that affect their health and survival.
4. Cities are planned and maintained so that everyone, including the very young, the very old and people with disabilities can access the city and be safe.

**Future actions by WHO:**

- **WHO-UNHABITAT report on urban health inequities:** This report will reveal the urban health inequities and will propose actions to be taken by local municipalities. This report will be published later in the year.
- **Global Forum on urbanization and health:** This forum will bring together municipal leaders, policy and decision makers across multiple sectors with the aim of promoting joint actions to reduce health inequities in urban settings. The forum will be held in Kobe, Japan 15-17 November.
- **Programme on urban health equity:** The WHO Centre for Health Development in collaboration with the WHO Regional Offices will work with specific cities and countries to assess urban health inequities and identify appropriate actions to reduce them. Local participatory governance mechanisms will be identified to ensure sustainability of interventions.
- **Health in all urban policies:** Urban health advocates will be identified to continue to keep the momentum on urban health matters. Dissemination of successful city experiences will be shared through regional and global meetings of WHO and partners.
- **Urban health impact assessment (HIA)** WHO will help municipal authorities in assessing the health impact of planning options in other sectors, such as urban transportation and the safety of roads for both vehicles and pedestrians.

