

III. WHAT CAN BE DONE: CALLS TO ACTION



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

On World Health Day 2010, WHO recommends the following five calls to action to build a healthy and safe urban environment:

- 1!** Promote urban planning for healthy behaviours and safety
- 2!** Improve urban living conditions
- 3!** Ensure participatory urban governance
- 4!** Build inclusive cities that are accessible and age-friendly
- 5!** Make urban areas resilient to emergencies and disasters

These five calls to action do not necessarily require additional funding, but political commitment is vital to redirect resources to priority interventions, thereby achieving greater efficiency.

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1!

Promote urban planning for healthy behaviours and safety

Urban planning can promote healthy behaviours and safety in many different ways, applicable both to existing and new areas. These would include design for physical activity in cities, where healthy food is available, safe, accessible and affordable, where health services for all are provided and where roads are safe.

Concrete and feasible actions that can be taken include:

- Design cities to promote physical activity
- Make healthy food available, safe, and affordable
- Provide adequate health services for all
- Improve road safety

2!

Improve urban living conditions

Improvements in housing and housing conditions, control of pollution and improvement in water and sanitation go a long way to mitigating health risks. Land security and tenure is a foundation on which health can be built. Squatter settlements are often illegal but generally represent the only option open to poor people, migrant or local, in search of shelter. Informal settlements are rarely provided with basic social services.

Concrete and feasible actions that can be taken include:

- Locate houses in safe places
- Improve housing conditions
- Control indoor and outdoor pollution
- Ensure safe water and improved sanitation



3!

Ensure participatory urban governance

Local participatory governance mechanisms should be established that enable communities and local governments to partner in building healthier and safer cities. Good urban governance means paying attention to concerns and planning horizons that extend beyond current needs (25). In many developing nations, present urban problems are only the beginning. Cities need a longer term strategy in order to turn urbanization's potential into reality.

Action and successful implementation require four preconditions for change: political commitment at the highest level where health, equity and sustainable development are core values in a city's policies and vision; shared vision, understanding and commitment to a comprehensive and systematic approach

for urban health; organizational structures and processes to coordinate, manage and support change and to facilitate intersectoral action and active citizen involvement; and opportunities for partnership-building and networking with statutory and non-statutory bodies and community groups (26).

Concrete and feasible actions that can be taken include:

- Share information about city planning for health
- Encourage public dialogue
- Involve communities in decision-making
- Create opportunities for participation

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4!

Build inclusive cities that are accessible and age-friendly

Globally, populations are rapidly ageing, leading to more older persons, many of whom will experience mobility and sensory impairments. WHO has developed a guide that is aimed primarily at urban planners to monitor progress towards more age-friendly cities in general (27).

Concrete and feasible actions that can be taken include:

- ⋮ Make public transport accessible to disabled people
- ⋮ Develop safe walkways for those with special needs
- ⋮ Build public places and buildings for easy access
- ⋮ Promote active city life and sports for all

5!

Make urban areas resilient to emergencies and disasters

Urban settings face complex emergencies, including natural and human-made disasters. Local governments can play a crucial role in urban disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness, and assessment and response in coordination with other emergency management mechanisms at the global, regional and national levels.

Concrete and feasible actions that can be taken:

- ⋮ Locate health facilities in safe areas
- ⋮ Build more resilient health facilities to withstand known dangers
- ⋮ Strengthen community preparedness and response capacity
- ⋮ Improve disease surveillance

In summary, for the first time in history, we are living in a predominantly urban world. Urbanization is continuing, and local and national governments as well as communities are facing many challenges as more people are living in cities. It is our collective responsibility to take action now to make sure that cities are healthy for all people at all times.

ANNEX: A ROLE FOR ALL – WHO CAN DO WHAT?



MINISTRIES OF HEALTH

- o **Become more informed** about the social determinants of health, and how urban policy choices impact health and development.
- o **Engage other sectors** proactively in dialogue, including housing, transport, industry, water and sanitation, education, environment and finance agencies.
- o **Lead by example** by supporting healthier and more livable cities.
- o **Support** health and environmental impact assessment for urban plans and policies.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

- o **Show leadership** by providing role models and by setting an example. Champion walking, cycling, active lifestyles and community designs that support these activities.
- o **Foster collaboration within local government** through forums for city

departments (such as transport, health, public safety, parks and recreation and education) to discuss the development of an integrated urban health strategy. Encourage public health and urban planners to work closely together.

- o **Partner with voluntary organizations, professionals and community organizations** and establish a mechanism that will give health professionals the opportunity to provide input on planning and transport plans.
- o **Share information** and set up mechanisms for sharing data on active living, for example on the health costs of inactivity and pedestrian travel and safety patterns, across government departments and with civil society and the community.
- o **Encourage and enable community participation** by engaging the nongovernmental, private and public sectors as well as citizens of all ages in planning and implementing initiatives to encourage active living and physical activity.

CIVIL SOCIETY

- o **Ensure that people are fully engaged in shaping the policies** and programmes that affect their lives.
- o **Include residents of informal settlements** in formal processes by setting up groups, associations and federations. Large or small, organizations of the urban poor should come together to identify the social and economic conditions that they face; to find practical solutions to these problems; to struggle against marginalization; and to ensure access to the goods and services to which they are entitled.
- o **Work with governments on participatory planning and budgeting** to allocate a greater portion of the municipal investment budget to priorities determined by neighbourhoods and community groups.

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RESEARCHERS

- o **Generate and systematize knowledge to address the many existing information gaps, including:**
 - potential advantages of urbanization and urban growth;
 - the inequities of health disaggregated by intra-urban area;
 - the effectiveness of proactive approaches to deal with health inequity in cities; and
 - the importance of involving all citizens in the decisions that affect their habitat and their health.

URBAN PLANNERS

- o **Use zoning and land use regulations** as a way to prevent exposure of city dwellers to pollution emissions and hazards from industrial activities, waste and chemicals, and well as transport.
- o **Develop/adopt building practices that protect health** among building users regarding indoor air environment, safety, noise, water, sanitation and waste management, among several other health determinants in urban settings.
- o **Build compact cities**, where dwellers have easy access to green areas, public transport, cycle paths and health, education and other fundamental social services.
- o **Incorporate Health Impact Assessment (HIA)** into the consideration of alternative planning choices and policies.

INTERNATIONAL AGENCIES

- o **Promote and support policies** to promote healthy environments.
- o **Disseminate lessons learned** from one part of the world to other.
- o **Support women's rights, poverty reduction and equity-promoting** strategies and programmes.
- o **Encourage policy-makers to generate and use sociodemographic** information to make better decisions regarding the urban future.

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