

# *The Kolkata Call to Action*

*Healthy People – Healthy Environment*



Co-sponsored by



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The 14<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Public Health on February 15, 2015 in Kolkata, India with delegates gathered from 70 countries around the globe call upon health care providers, government leaders, and all representatives of civil society to take urgent action to mitigate environmental conditions that are contributing to the deaths and diseases of millions of inhabitants of our small planet.

### ***The delegates declared***

*The time for study and debate is past for the vast majority of the social, environmental and economic killers that stalk human kind. The time for action has arrived. As public health experts from all corners of the globe we declare that the evidence is clear.*

### **Social, Economic and Environmental Determinants of Disease and Development**

*With the proximity of the 2015 UN General Assembly, it is essential to stress to the unfinished agenda and the progress and failures of the MDG. Political, economic, social and environmental development is itself a product of social equity. Social equity means improvement of quality of life in all life courses of all citizens. With all these concepts - political, economic, social and environmental equity - is Health. Health cannot and should not be purchased for the rich but rather a human right of all<sup>1</sup>.*

*Without such a commitment disease will grow in prevalence and no one rich or poor will be without risk. The outbreak of Ebola in West Africa illustrates the problem. The disease spread so widely because of poverty. Poor community infrastructure such as clean water and sanitation, poor health infrastructure including facilities and adequate numbers of appropriately trained health and medical staff all increased the likelihood of the spread of disease globally.*

### **Climate and Health**

*The profound threat to human health from global warming and resulting climate change is central to the challenges of this century. The human contribution to warming through energy generation from fossil fuels, and coal in particular, provide clear requirement to mitigate these effects and protect thousands of lives at risk as well from the air pollution inherent in these processes. These risks too fall unevenly on the poor within countries and poor nations globally. We must commit to sustainable and renewable energy technologies and not short term and potentially dangerous methods such as nuclear fission and hydraulic fracking.*

### **Non-Communicable Disease and Its Causes**

*While infectious disease continue to capture the world's attention it is the insidious rise of non-communicable diseases that form the basis of the biggest challenges in this next period. Priority must be given to foster structural changes in society aiming at more equal distribution of wealth and power among people in each country and among countries and regions worldwide as the root causes of NCD-related morbidity and mortality. Support must be given to stronger community action to influence exercise and lifestyle and to control tobacco, alcohol, obesity, poor dental health, chemical exposures and the occupational environment.*

### **Universal health coverage**

*As the risks described above fall unevenly upon the poorest countries and peoples so does the lack of adequate access to medical care and least recognition in practice of health care as a human right. Attendees at the Congress re-affirm the Declarations of the prior Congresses in Beijing, Istanbul, and Addis Abba and issue this call to global action. Better analysis and study are always needed but it is time to "roll up our sleeves" and advocate for action to protect the public's health. Specific activities will vary depending upon national or international settings but on return in three years the measure of the public's health will be dependent upon our actions in these broad areas.*

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<sup>1</sup> As reflected in the **Health-related Millennium Development Goals**

# ***FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS TO THE KOLKATA CALL TO ACTION***

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## Background

Delegates from 70 countries gathered in Kolkata, India for the 14<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Public Health from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of February, 2015.

The delegates from a very wide range of health disciplines agreed that it is already past the time for action on improving the health of people and the environment. We know what needs to be done. It is now time to persuade governments across the world to take action to ensure better health and healthier environments.

Attendees at the Congress re-affirmed the 2009 Istanbul Declaration on 'Health, the First Human Right', the 2011 Rio Political Declaration on the Social Determinants of Health, the 2012 Bangkok Statement on Universal Health Coverage and the 2012 Addis Ababa Declaration on Global Health Equity: 'A Call to Action'.

## Advocacy

Attendees at the Congress agreed to use their own best endeavours, and called on all everyone to join them in active efforts towards a healthier and more sustainable world.

Change is urgently needed, both in policy and public health responses and services for the wellbeing of people around the world.

Achieving positive outcomes requires active participation in public health policy and practice by "making public health recommendations, implementing intervention programs, and participating as an advocate" (Nessa)<sup>1</sup>.

### ***The 14<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Take all appropriate action to bring about healthier people and healthier environments
- Reinforce historical values and principles advocated on previous statements, resolutions, and declarations, focusing on the commitments and actions for the reduction of the political, economic, social and environmental inequities and disparities at personal, national and global level. "Equal rights for all, and implementation of all components of the rule of law, are essential to encourage, protect and improve public health" (Istanbul Declaration).
- Strengthen networking and collaboration among national, regional, and global public health associations to facilitate the sharing of experiences and the building of capacities to enhance both influence on policy and action for healthier people and healthier environments
- Negotiate and adopt shared goals and objectives and work towards common results across sectors and institutions, at all levels of governance;
- Ensure that the private sector and other players accept their responsibilities to safeguard and promote the health of their clients, workers, customers and communities.
- Strengthen leadership
  - By negotiating and adopting shared goals and objectives and working towards common results across sectors and institutions, at all levels of governance;
  - By ensuring that the private sector and other players accept their responsibilities to safeguard and promote the health of their clients, workers, customers and communities.

## Leadership

The 14th World Congress on Public Health provided an opportunity for change. Having brought people together from various disciplines of public health and beyond, it is now time to influence governments, organisations, agencies and institutions everywhere to meet the challenge of improving people's health.

Attendees at the Kolkata Congress determined to use their best efforts to provide leadership across the world to improve human health.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Strengthen networking and collaboration among national and regional public health associations to facilitate the sharing of experience and the building of capacity to enhance both influence on policy and action on healthier people and healthier environments
- Negotiate and adopt shared goals and objectives and work towards common results across sectors and institutions, at all levels of governance;
- Ensure that the private sector and other players accept their responsibilities to safeguard and promote the health of their clients, workers, customers and communities.
- Strengthen leadership
  - By negotiating and adopting shared goals and objectives and working towards common results across sectors and institutions, at all levels of governance;
  - By ensuring that the private sector and other players accept their responsibilities to safeguard and promote the health of their clients, workers, customers and communities.

## Policy

Leadership in public health along with effective advocacy will be most successful when based on sound research which forms the basis of well-developed policies. It is incumbent upon all to enhance policy and to use leadership and advocacy skills to implement those policies in a structured way.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Develop political momentum and leadership for health, in all policies and settings
- Mainstream partnership approaches across all policies, programs, and research agendas with a focus on health equity, ensuring integrated planning, capacity-building and resource allocation
- Establish key indicators to measure the performance of initiatives undertaken as follow-up action
- Create functional inter-governmental regional bodies, such as the WFPHA regional Associations, to set a vision and agenda for, and advocate and mobilize resources in the region to achieve these policy outcomes
- Develop and adapt to country context, tools, mechanisms and capacities to create opportunities at local, regional and national levels for inter-sectoral action
- Cascade the strategic implementation down to the grass root level by consultations and capacity building through WFPHA branches all over the world.

## Social Determinants of Health and Health Equity

The last decade, particularly with the influence of the Global Financial Crisis, has seen a growing disparity around the world between the wealthy and the poor. With this growing disparity in wealth comes a commensurate divide between those with good health and those poorer health. In a nutshell the WHO report on the Social Determinants of Health illustrates that mostly people who are wealthier are healthier. At the same time the health care of ageing populations are an emerging global challenge.

The outbreak of Ebola in West Africa illustrates the problem. The disease spread so widely because of poverty. Poor community infrastructure such as clean water and sanitation, poor health infrastructure including facilities, lack of health awareness and inadequate numbers of appropriately trained health and medical staff all increased the likelihood of the spread of disease.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Promote and attain social justice and equity in health by acting through 'Social Determinants of Health' strategies
- Reduce inequities and disparities at local, national and global levels as prerequisite of improved public health
- Empower social participation, particularly on vulnerable and marginalized populations, toward the human rights and civil movements for safe shelter, nurturing parents, supportive communities, primary schooling, rewarding work, and peaceful societies.

## Health and Development

There is no development without health. More than free access to public services, Health is the reduction of the social inequities, which includes efficient policies to habitation, to sanitation, sustainable and efficient policies to rural and urban transport, to food and nutrition, policies to drink water and to protect the environment and their diversity.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Define and execute robust strategies and inter sectoral governance policies to face the political - economics - social and environmental inequities and the unfinished agenda related to MDGs, toward an post 2015 global agenda focusing on sustainable development goals (SDGs) for the improvement of quality of life to all;
- Through human rights, promote and reinforce social participation in all levels, in an inclusive global agenda, involving public and private sectors, decisions makers, academics, researchers, and leaderships from social global community.

## Environmental Determinants of Health

The health of the natural environment underpins healthy people. Human activity is damaging the natural environment and disrupting the ecosystem services that enable human health and wellbeing. We also note the importance of biodiversity to human health and human health care.

### ***The 14th WCPH therefore calls on all to:***

- Include environmental determinants of health as a factor in action to address the SDGs and climate mitigation.

## Climate and Health

Attendees at the Kolkata Congress recognise the profound threat to human health from global warming and resulting climate change. They also recognise the contribution of fossil fuels, and coal in particular, to climate change, as well as to detrimental impacts on the health and wellbeing of local communities. The public health professionals and organisations in attendance recognise that health depends upon the integrity of the earth's ecosystems and the sustainability of its resources.

They further recognise the need for national and international policies to ensure there is a rapid transition away from fossil fuels over the next decade to ensure the health of national populations and humanity's future. Hence public health associations across the world will need to contribute to national policy development to facilitate the expansion of renewable energy infrastructure as a substantive public health measure as well as committing to reduce their own carbon footprint and to divest from any fossil fuel investments in their portfolios.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Pledge to advocate for strong and effective cuts to greenhouse gas emissions through national and international agreements and programs, and will advocate for a strong and binding agreement in Paris in 2015
- Advocate for a rapid phase out of coal for electricity production and greater investment in renewable energy technologies as a significant investment in global health and healthy communities
- Commence action to divest from any assets held by all public health associations that include investment in fossil fuel projects or infrastructure

## International Treaties

### Trade Negotiations

"It is important for public health professionals and organisations to engage with trade policy issues". As Gleeson and Legge pointed out in (ANZJPH 2012 Vol 36 No 1)ii and they explained "Trade relations affect the way we live and the determinants of health such as employment patterns, nutrition, economic development and living standards. Trade agreements to regulate trade relations can contribute to better health where they lead to increased employment and economic development (assuming benefits are well distributed, decent working conditions are maintained and growth is not achieved at the cost of the environment), but they can also reduce the ability of governments to protect health. Trade agreements can enable transnational corporations to discourage governments from regulating for health (e.g threatening to use indirect expropriation clauses to discourage governments from regulating tobacco packaging) or from regulating for health care (e.g. deploying United States trade power to undermine pharmaceutical pricing and reimbursement schemes)".

Further, the TPPA investor state dispute settlement mechanisms will also inhibit national governments legislating to protect their natural environments.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Advocate that trade and investment negotiations are conducted transparently and that negotiating texts are exposed to full Parliamentary and public scrutiny before they are signed.
- Engage the world's public health fraternity in trade negotiations

- Resist divisive elements such as:
  - The Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms,
  - Intellectual property changes which will result in more restricted access to medicines
  - Interference with food security
- Ensure exemptions in international treaties to allow governments the ability to regulate to protect public health

## Generic Medicines

India, often popularly denoted as the 'Pharmacy of the South' is the principal source of low cost generic medicines for millions of poor patients in LMICs, and over 80% of HIV medicines used in developing countries are generics produced in India. The WFPHA Congress in Kolkata affirms the importance of key public health safeguards in India's patent laws, for ensuring that its generic medicines industry can continue to provide affordable medicines for much of the world's population. It notes the pressure the Indian Government is under to weaken its patent laws to allow more patents on medicines. It further understands that this pressure is being exerted by several different countries (e.g. the United States, Japan and the European Union) and through different forums, including direct pressure (by the US, for example, through its annual priority Super 301 list and a recent out of cycle review by the USTR of India's IP policy) and through negotiations for various trade agreements.<sup>iii</sup>

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Express deep concern about the impact on millions of people in the developing world if India succumbs to this pressure;
- Urge the Indian Government stand firm under pressure and resist all attempts to alter its patent laws in ways which prolong drug monopolies; and
- Encourage developed countries to immediately desist from efforts to force India to adopt an IP policy that promotes the interests of pharmaceutical TNCs and weakens the capacity of the domestic generics industry.

## Health Interventions

### Using Health Technology

Health technology can bring about major changes in public health. However, there is significant danger that funding of research, development and implementation of such technology will be focussed on significant advances for expensive individual treatment in hospitals for the wealthy rather than in improving such technology as data bases, communication and records that will have a significant impact on broader population health.

### Alternative Medicines

While alternative medicines have been practiced for a long time in societies, their merit and impact on physical, mental and social wellbeing of individuals and communities need to be substantiated with evidence. Traditional wisdoms and practices with proven merits in promoting and protecting health and prolonging life could be preserved. The role of research is critical in this regard.



## Immunisation

While immunisation coverage rates are continuing to reduce morbidity and mortality from vaccine preventable disease (VPD), multiple strategies are needed to improve immunisation uptake in socially disadvantaged countries and communities, communities influenced by groups opposed to vaccination and where coverage is low in specific age groups. The role of Governments is to lead, inform, regulate, monitor and enforce strong vaccination policies within communities, workplaces and healthcare organisations to encourage people to recognise the role they play in protecting themselves and others.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Ensure that funding for the use of health technology results in a fair and equitable distribution of health outcomes
- Advocate amongst public health professionals and governments to ensure systematic evidence on the use of alternative medicines to contribute to individual and community health.
- Urge governments and public health professionals to do all within their power to support widespread and appropriate use of vaccines

## Non-Communicable Disease – Tobacco, Alcohol and Obesity

The growth of Non-Communicable Disease as a leading cause of ill-health is of major concern to all at the Kolkata Congress. The continuing increase in diseases such as cancer, diabetes and cardio-vascular disease associated with poor diet and continuing use of tobacco and misuse of alcohol illustrates the need for strident action on the causes of the so called 'lifestyle' diseases.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Enhance community awareness raising initiatives on the detrimental impact and contribution of tobacco alcohol and obesity on individual and community health and longevity as well as on national economy
- Instil positive health values at a very young age and to enhance the role of schools as focal institutions for long-term combating of non-communicable diseases need to be reinvigorated
- Use the existing evidence to prove to policy-makers that partnerships are fundamental to address the determinants and manage the emerging epidemic of NCDs
- Urge governments and stakeholders to exercise their responsibility for NCD prevention and control, including working in partnership across sectors and be accountable for improving people's quality of life and wellbeing
- Implement all forms of collaboration, cooperation and integration between sectors through actions and partnerships that extend beyond the health sector.

## Mental Health

The emphasis and attention given in research, training and availability of services has not been commensurate compared to other disciplines of public health.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Ensure national, regional and global public health associations and schools of public continue their advocacy for concerted national and international efforts for actions in the promotion, care treatment and protection of mental health.

## Oral Health

Every person has a right to good oral health. Oral health is an integral part of overall well-being and essential for eating, growth, speech, social development, learning capacity and quality of life. Oral health problems in children can impact on many aspects of their general health and development, causing substantial pain and disruption to their lives and often altering their behaviour.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Advocate for the following improvements in oral health – especially for children:
  - Oral health education including oral hygiene and dietary advice, access to affordable toothbrushes and toothpaste with fluoride from eruption of the first primary tooth
  - Preventive interventions, appropriate to infrastructure and priorities of the country, including dental sealants, community fluoridation, and regular fluoride varnish
  - Treatment of early stage decay to stop it from progressing to cavities, and treatment of dental cavities, acute pain and other oral diseases
  - Environments that eliminate advertising of unhealthy foods to children.

## Gender and respect

### Sexual and Reproductive Health

Maternal health problems remain a major cause of death and illness for women and infants. Global statistics provided by the World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank estimate that 287,000 maternal deaths occurred worldwide in 2010. Lack of access to quality reproductive health services contributes to maternal mortality. References to “traditional” or “moral” values are sometimes used to deny women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights.

### Violence

Gender based violence is increasing at alarming rate at family and community levels affecting health and survival. Sexual violence to girls, women and boys has been expanding especially in societies engaged in war. In addition to its impact on physical mental and social health of the individuals affected, it is also a severe violation of human and children’s rights.

Violence based on race, ethnic or religious differences, sex, gender, or sexual orientation are a scourge in modern society and must be over come through public health methods of prevention, education, and elimination of the conditions that promote such hatred to achieve our shared health goals.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Ensure that all steps are taken to guarantee that women have control over family planning and their own reproductive health
- Engage in public education and advocacy at local regional and global levels for multi-sectoral action by governments and communities to protect women and children from gender based and sexual violence and to ensure access to care for those affected.

## Nuclear Fission

We remain concerned about the anachronistic and dangerous stock piles of nuclear weapons and a reliance on fission to solve the world’s energy demands.

### ***The 14th World Congress on Public Health therefore calls on all to:***

- Ensure that all steps are taken to reduce the number and distribution of nuclear weapons throughout the world
- Commit to sustainable and renewable energy technologies and not short term and potentially dangerous methods such as nuclear fission.

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