Dhaka Statement on Urban Health in Sustainable Development

Outcome Document of International Conference on Urban Health 2015
A Call for Action

The International Society of Urban Health (ISUH) and the participants in the 12th International Conference on Urban Health call for recognition of urban health as a priority in sustainable development, including in the proposed sustainable development goals, targets and indicators for the post-2015 development agenda.

We are urban health experts across disciplines, practitioners across sectors and representatives of civil society organizations.

The Conference Recognizes that:

Currently more than half of the world’s population lives in cities and by 2050, it is estimated that 70% of the world’s population will be urban dwellers. While all countries confront challenges from urbanization, the pace and scale of urbanization is now most rapid in low and middle-income countries.

Cities are the drivers of national development and offer access to a wide array of goods and services (including health services), education, and social and cultural opportunities.

- People are attracted to live in urban areas because of the potential to improve their lives, including through economic opportunities. As a result, urban residents often provide important economic support to their rural home communities.
- Urban settings can improve access to health services, education, and social and cultural opportunities and, when growth is effectively managed, cities can be part of the solution and not just part of the problem in national development.
- If plans for the built environment (e.g. housing, land use, transport) include consideration of health impact, cities can facilitate healthy choices of food, exercise, and social engagement for its residents.
- If well managed, cities can be engines of development for national economies and centers of technological innovation and positive social progress including education and empowerment of women.
- Population density in cities can facilitate delivery of development interventions to large numbers of people.

Cities can also be sites of extreme poverty, environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure, and a combination of risk factors that have adverse impacts on health.

- Countries that fail to plan for increasing urbanization place their citizens at serious health, economic, and security risk.
- The health of slum dwellers and the homeless is typically well below that in other urban and rural areas, even when stratified by poverty level. These inequities are also observed in other critical development indicators affect the health of the entire city.
- In addition to traditional urban health, challenges of water, sanitation, infectious diseases, and environmental pollutants, city residents confront chronic diseases linked to poor diets,
sedentary lifestyles, and obesity. Urban dwellers also face physical and mental health issues linked to safety, violence, poverty, and unemployment, and they are at risk for road accidents and other injuries.

- Coastal cities face particular risk from the effects of climate change, including extreme weather events, natural disasters, sea level rise, and inundation.
- Settlements without legal status, basic infrastructure, energy security, and services can become focal points for social tensions, conflict, and illicit economic activity.

Strong and effective governance is required to promote urban health – particularly a strong public health infrastructure that can work in partnership with other sectors to examine potential risks and benefits to health of policies, programs and investments across sectors (a Health-In-All approach-ref)

**The Conference Welcomes:**

The *Synthesis Report of the UN Secretary General on the Post 2015 Agenda* (Dec 2014), which identifies six essential elements for delivering the SDGs and proposes 17 Sustainable Development Goals, includes a specific goal for Health (#3) and for Cities (#11);

The *Joint Statement of the UN Platform on Social Determinants of Health* (World Health Organization) which outlines the relationship between health and other societal goals across multiple sectors: the economy and employment; security and justice; education and early life; agriculture and food; architecture, planning and transportation; environment and sustainability; housing and community services; and land and culture;

World Health Organization recognition that urbanization is a major public health challenge in the 21st century and calls for a shared effort involving governments, international organizations, business and civil society to put health at the heart of urban policy (*Urban HEART: Urban Health Equity Assessment and Response Tool*, World Health Organization);

The Nine Principles of *The City We Need* articulated by the World Urban Campaign, a coalition of global partners working with UN-HABITAT to advance a *New Urban Agenda* and the work of UN-HABITAT to promote well-planned, well-governed, and efficient cities and other human settlements, with adequate housing, infrastructure, and universal access to employment and basic services.

All of these initiatives acknowledge the growing importance of cities in achieving sustainable development; that the health of people living in cities is affected by multiple factors; that decisions in all sectors can have a positive or negative effects on human health; and that healthy people are critical to social and economic development.

**The Conference Encourages the Following Actions:**

1. That the planned political declaration designed to preface the Sustainable Development Goals should make specific reference to the critical importance of the health of urban dwellers to achieving the SDGs;
2. That in order to achieve the health targets outlined in Goal 3 in the Outcome Document of the Open Working Group on SDGs: *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*, there is a pressing need for evidence-based and cost-effective interventions that address the effects of urban diversity, complexity, density and disparities on the broad determinants of health;

3. That the targets for Goal 11 in the Outcome Document of the Open Working Group on SDGs: *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*, should include a commitment that the solutions chosen have a positive impact on human health and do not adversely affect health of people in cities;

4. That more generally the SDGs should include targets and indicators that reflect progress towards urban health and health equity;

5. That attention to the unique opportunities and challenges of urban environments should be mainstreamed across the SDGs; and

6. That because over half the world’s population lives in cities, and urban populations are rapidly growing worldwide, the health of people in cities must be a central concern in sustainable development including mobilizing resources for capacity building, applied research and strengthening governance for urban health.