



**WHO European Ministerial Conference on
the life-course approach in the context of
Health 2020**

Act early, act on time, act together

**Minsk, Belarus
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Scope and purpose

Health across the life-course

Health is an asset that grows or declines every single day, throughout the life-course. There are critical stages in life at which governments can act to maximize the health potential of the entire population.

This Ministerial Conference will consider the existing evidence in support of these assertions, presenting new findings from the environmental, economic and social sciences, genetics and medicine and linking them with public health interventions.

The Conference will be the first European ministerial meeting to discuss applying the life-course approach to the implementation of Health 2020 – the European policy framework for health and well-being. It will also be the first time that ministers of health meet since the adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for the post-2015 period.

The Conference will build a compelling case for public health action to improve health using the life-course approach.

Life-course approach

If the life-course approach were truly applied to public health in Europe:

- pregnancy would be a healthy and joyful experience for all involved. Birth would be safe for both mother and child. Children would be born to welcoming parents. They would form an early attachment to their mother and would have their minds stimulated from the first days of life. Their childhood would be free from physical, mental and sexual abuse and would take place in the context of a healthy environment.
- young people would have access to an educational system that enhances positive ideals and skills and guides them away from becoming threats to their own well-being, and to peace and security. They would not be subject to pressure that forces them to adopt risky sexual or consumer behaviours that could harm them for the rest of their lives. Their life choices would promote, not damage, their health.
- populations faced with the threats and consequences of financial crises, unemployment, displacement and insecurity would be enabled to cope, thrive and recover.

The reality in a Europe that is increasingly ageing and vulnerable is far from this ideal vision.

The Conference will assist countries in setting priorities for public policies and in balancing long-term public health needs with the growing expectations of citizens. It will argue that the life-course approach will benefit both human development and economic growth in the medium to long term. The life-course approach will be promoted at the Conference as an integration of new science with established public health practice, giving new legitimacy to investment in health.

The Conference, hosted by the Ministry of Health of Belarus, is being organized by the WHO Regional Office for Europe, supported by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund.

Objectives

The Conference will have three main objectives:

- (1) to review new evidence on the factors that engender or damage health across life stages and across generations;
- (2) to examine the policy implications of this evidence for the health sector and for the whole of government; and
- (3) to adopt an action framework in the form of a Conference outcome statement as a resource for countries that wish to apply these findings in public policy-making.

Action framework

The action framework will be based on three claims.

- (1) A good start early in life has health benefits that last a lifetime.
- (2) It is possible to increase the health potential of individuals and populations at every age.
- (3) Populations facing threatening social transitions can be protected from the negative consequences and guided towards better health.

The action framework that arises from these conclusions will be presented to the ministerial delegations in the form of keynote presentations, case studies, a background technical paper and a glossary of life-course concepts. It is expected that participants will develop and adopt a Conference outcome statement that will further guide the implementation of the European Health 2020 strategic framework both at the country and the regional levels.