

World Health Summit: A defining year for global health

The 2023 World Health Summit, held in Berlin, Germany, and virtually from October 15 to October 17, focused on the theme “A Defining Year for Global Health Action.” This global event brought together leaders, scientists, business professionals, and concerned individuals to discuss ways to enhance public health on a global scale. The summit is known for promoting international cooperation and open dialogues rooted in scientific insights, placing global health at the forefront of political agendas, and aligning with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Key sessions at the World Health Summit 2023 focused on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, universal health coverage, sustainable health, global health equity, digital health technologies, the 75th anniversary of the World Health Organization, innovations in the fight against tuberculosis, and the Global Financing Facility (GFF) Pledging Event.

A significant focus was also given to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which have become a critical global health challenge. Dr. Bharati Pravin Pawar, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, who participated from India, stressed the need to address NCDs comprehensively. India’s commitment to this endeavor includes initiatives like the 75/25 Initiative to screen and provide care for millions with hypertension and diabetes by 2025, incorporating hypertension and diabetes treatment in the Outcome Budget, the National Programme for Prevention and Control of NCDs (NP-NCD), the end-TB goal 2025 and the Ayushman Bharat initiative. It was also highlighted that India has implemented population-based screening, and teleconsultation services through e-Sanjeevani and the National NCD Portal, which play a crucial role in improving healthcare delivery and NCD management. Dr. Pawar emphasized the importance of a global collaborative approach to tackle NCDs, looking at the interconnectedness of global health and the need for unity and shared responsibility in addressing healthcare challenges.



WORLD
HEALTH
SUMMIT





76th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia stresses importance of knowledge sharing and collaboration

The 76th session of the World Health Organization Regional Committee for South-East Asia witnessed Union Health Minister Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya addressing over 850 youth leaders passionate about gender equality and fostering girl leadership. The event, held in New Delhi, saw Dr Mandaviya being unanimously elected as the Chairperson of the regional committee for South-East Asia.

Dr Mandaviya highlighted the success of Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWC) in delivering comprehensive primary healthcare services. He mentioned that these centers have recorded over 2.1 billion visits, providing free drugs over 1.83 billion times and conducting over 26 million wellness sessions. Initiatives such as Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission and PM-ABHIM have bolstered the digital health framework and healthcare infrastructure.

The event also celebrated India's contribution to the WHO SEARO Building project, fostering collaboration, research, and knowledge exchange in healthcare. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, commended the region's efforts in healthcare and recognized India's achievements in operating more than 150,000 Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres. The event underscored the importance of knowledge sharing and collaborative support in addressing healthcare challenges in the South-East Asia region.

Smriti Irani launches protocol for child malnutrition management at Anganwadi level

On October 10, 2023, Union Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani launched a 'Protocol for Management of Malnutrition in Children' to address the management of severe acute malnourished (SAM) children. This national protocol, drafted by the Centre, introduces significant changes in the approach to handling malnourished children at Anganwadi centers. SAM children without medical complications will now be managed at Anganwadi centers rather than nutrition rehabilitation centers (NRCs). About 7% of over seven crore children evaluated at Anganwadi centers across India are severely acutely malnourished.

The protocol emphasizes the use of growth monitoring data and appetite tests to identify malnourished children. It also extends NRC services to infants aged one to six months with severe malnutrition, previously not included. It emphasizes early screening for health issues, hidden infections, and danger signs. Medical complications prompt referral to the nearest health facility. For infants less than six months old who exhibit signs of severe malnutrition, immediate referral to a health facility or NRC is recommended. Severely underweight children up to six months should also be referred directly to NRCs as per WHO guidelines. Overall, this protocol seeks to improve the identification and management of malnourished children in India, ensuring that they receive appropriate care and treatment.



WHO releases global roadmap to address postpartum haemorrhage, a leading cause of maternal death

The World Health Organization (WHO) released its first roadmap to tackle postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) on October 11, 2023. The roadmap outlines goals and activities for research, normative work, implementation, and advocacy between 2023 and 2030. It aims to help countries address stark differences in survival outcomes from PPH, which reflect major inequities in access to essential health services. Over 85% of deaths from PPH happen in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

It has been developed through extensive consultations involving more than 130 experts across diverse fields, and implementation will be guided by an interdisciplinary steering committee. WHO and its partners will provide specialized technical support to countries to adapt global guidelines into national policies, with a special focus on countries where there is the highest burden of maternal deaths. PPH is the leading cause of maternal deaths worldwide, resulting in around 70,000 deaths each year. It is also a major cause of disabilities and psychological trauma for survivors.

The priority actions include developing new and broader guidance for PPH covering prevention, detection, and treatment; Conducting research to deliver innovations and to increase access to proven interventions; Establishing a new procurement mechanism to improve the supply of high-quality medicines and commodities; Advocating and building awareness of PPH; and providing training and facility-based improvements at the country level.



Combating Anaemia through an integrated approach

An expert roundtable organized by the Integrated Health & Wellbeing Council on October 21, 2023, to launch a campaign “Movement Against Anemia” emphasized the need for comprehensive and multilateral action to curb the high prevalence of anemia in the country. During the session experts strongly encouraged the adoption of an integrated approach to combat the invasive issue of anemia. Anemia, characterized by a deficiency of healthy red blood cells, has long been a public health concern in the country, particularly affecting women, and children.

The experts’ recommendation emphasized the urgency of addressing anemia carefully through a combination of strategies, including improved nutrition, fortified food, iron supplementation, and effective awareness campaigns. They highlighted that this approach should involve the collaborative efforts of the government, healthcare providers, and various stakeholders to tackle the issue effectively. An integrated approach highlighted by experts aims at not only improving the immediate health burden but also preventing anemia in the long-term through sustainable interventions. Advocating for a holistic approach, the experts highlighted the pressing need for proactive measures to combat anemia in India, ultimately improving the health and well-being of the nation’s citizens. This initiative aligns with the broader global effort to reduce anemia-related health disparities and enhancing overall public health.





Study finds Gen Z's mental health most impacted after COVID-19

A recent study by the Sapien Labs Centre for Human Brain and Mind at Krea University in India reveals that the mental health of individuals aged 18-24, particularly those who primarily speak English and use the internet, has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This large-scale study collected data from over 100,000 participants across India between April 2020 and August 2023, making it the most extensive survey of its kind in the country. The research indicates that mental health declined across all age groups, but the sharpest decline was observed among 18-24-year-olds. This decline isn't necessarily linked to economic factors, as it remains consistent across income levels.

The study emphasizes the importance of identifying early risk factors to develop prevention strategies for India's sizable youth population, which faces challenges entering the labour market, even among the more educated English-speaking and internet-enabled youth. Shailender Swaminathan, Director, Sapien Labs Centre, suggests that a preventive approach to mental health may be necessary due to the scale of the issue, citing evidence that delaying smartphone adoption may lead to better mental health outcomes for young adults.



Health Minister Mandaviya opens Rural Health Training Centre Hospital in Delhi's Najafgarh

On Wednesday, October 27, 2023, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya inaugurated the Rural Health Training Centre (RHTC) Hospital in Najafgarh, Delhi. The hospital is the fourth of its kind in the national capital and its inauguration takes forward Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Health for All" policy.

In his address at the event, Dr Mandaviya said that the government is committed to providing a strong health system and that the RHTC will address a long-standing healthcare access issue for the local population, especially the vulnerable and marginalized sections of society. The hospital's strategic location in Najafgarh will enable it to serve a population of 13.65 lakh residing in 73 surrounding villages. He also highlighted the government's commitment to providing affordable healthcare to all citizens. Dr Mandaviya also emphasized the government's focus on developing a skilled workforce in the healthcare sector. He said that the government has ensured the availability of a large pool of skilled medical professionals in the country.

The inauguration of the RHTC Hospital is a significant step as it will provide a wide range of services, including medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, ICU, NICU, PICU, ENT, ophthalmology, and blood bank. It will also have multiple diagnostic and radiological facilities.

New research shows Diabetes impacts bone and muscle health

Ongoing research at the Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS) highlights a concerning connection between diabetes and bone health, particularly among the elderly. The study underscores that individuals with diabetes face an increased risk of developing osteoporosis, a condition characterized by weakened and brittle bones. This association is significant because bone health depends on both bone mass and muscle mass, which are closely interrelated. The preliminary findings of this study, focusing on Lucknow and neighboring regions, reveal that 22% of elderly people with diabetes experience simultaneous bone and muscle loss, with this proportion surging to 40% after the age of 70. Alarmingly, these trends in India are twice as prevalent as in the Western world.

Several factors contribute to poor bone health in individuals with diabetes. Inadequate calcium intake and low exposure to sunlight, a crucial source of vitamin D, affects more than 70% of the Indian population. Lack of physical activity further compounds the issue. The implications of this research are significant, as poor bone health not only diminishes the quality of life but may also affect one's ability to manage diabetes effectively by limiting physical activity. As a result, experts recommend routine monitoring of both diabetes and bone health to mitigate potential complications. Understanding and addressing this emerging risk is vital, especially for the elderly population living with diabetes.



Kerala health summit leaders emphasize improved promotion of Ayurveda and modern medicine

The two-day Global Ayurveda Summit (GAS), which took place on 26th and 27th October in Adlux International Convention Center, Kerala, highlighted the importance of creating startup ecosystems in Ayurveda. The summit aimed to harness the potential of combining traditional Ayurvedic wisdom with innovative approaches. Organized by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in partnership with the Government of Kerala and the Ministry of AYUSH, this was the 5th GAS conference held concurrently with the 10th edition of the Kerala Health Tourism event. During the conference, discussions were around the growing health consciousness and a proactive approach towards preventive care and holistic wellness practices, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. Kerala, known for its rich tradition in Ayurveda, is striving to become a global hub for holistic treatment.

Former Kenyan Prime Minister, Raila Amolo Odinga, shared his profound respect and trust in Ayurveda, recounting how his daughter's eyesight was partially restored after undergoing treatment at an Ayurvedic eye hospital in Kerala, following unsuccessful attempts in Israel, China, and Germany. He emphasized the need for promoting Ayurveda as a complementary approach to modern medicine and fostering partnerships between India-based Ayurvedic centers and African service providers.

The summit focused on mainstreaming Ayurveda through branding, research, AI, and startups, with experts highlighting the potential for Ayurveda's business growth. They emphasized the importance of creating AyurTech startup ecosystems, which involve the integration of Artificial Intelligence and genomic technologies to provide evidence based Ayurvedic solutions. The event also featured an exhibition showcasing various Ayurvedic, modern medicine, and tourism products, drawing over 400 delegates from around the world.



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