

Global Health

Global Health - A definition
Ilona Kickbusch 2002

The term Global Health stands for a new context, a new awareness and a new strategic approach in matters of international health. Its focus is the impact of global interdependence on the determinants of health, the transfer of health risks and the policy response of countries, international organizations and the many other actors in the global health arena. Its goal is the equitable access to health in all regions of the globe.

The term International Health has mainly been used to encompass approaches to health problems in developing countries and the flow of resources and knowledge from the developed to the developing world. Global Health in contrast focuses on relationships of interdependence that transcend this division as well as national frontiers and policy sectors, in particular

- the global distribution of health and disease and their determinants,
- the impact of globalization on health and
- the changing nature of global health governance.

Global Health incorporates a historical perspective: global epidemics have ravaged societies in the past, there have been other periods of globalization in the world's history and for centuries countries have crafted international agreements and institutions to protect the health of their populations and (by proxy) their economies. With this in mind Global Health explores how at the beginning of the 21st century changing economic, political and social realities lead to a new quality of impact and necessitate new types of responses along two dimensions:

- First, Global Health contributes to the understanding of the extent to which the transfer of health risks changes in nature, direction and impact due to the increased speed, reduced distance and cultural transfer brought about by modern means of transport and communication as well as new forms of economic dependence and interdependence. Not only can infectious disease travel more rapidly than ever before, but so can harmful lifestyles, pollution, toxic substances and unsafe goods and products.
- Second, Global Health contributes to the development of strategies that counteract epidemiological polarization and aim to achieve a balance between supportive global mechanisms and decentralized approaches. As a priority this includes building the capacity of the developing world to govern health in the new global context as well as strengthening the local response to the new social, behavioral, environmental or biological risks to health such as the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, urban violence or bio-terrorist threats.

While technical solutions exist for many of the most pressing global health problems, closing the global health gap will require massive political and financial commitment in both developed and developing countries as well as a reorientation in policy and strategy. Indeed the very fact that solutions exist but are not accessible to the poorest is one of the key driving forces of the global health agenda. This entails resolving the participatory gap in setting global health priorities, the operational gap in building efficient and sustainable public health responses and the accountability gap in addressing the health needs of the poorest at the local and the global level.

Strategic responses give priority to increasing the capacity of all actors to work together as partners to produce better health outcomes and need to include:

- breaking down barriers between policy sectors such as foreign and domestic policy and including health in the security, foreign relations and economic development agenda, and
- developing inclusive systems of health governance that take into account the changing role of nation states and international organizations as well as the dense network of private sector and non-governmental actors in the health arena, as well as the dynamics between local and global responses.

Finally Global Health explores the emerging value base and the new agendas and relationships that emerge when health becomes an essential component and expression of global citizenship. In doing so it can build on a growing awareness that health is a valuable resource, a basic human right and a global public good that needs to be protected and promoted by the global community.

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