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AFRICA HEALTH  
ORGANISATION

# AHO STRATEGY & PLAN OF ACTION FOR INTEGRATED CHILD HEALTH

## Partners



# PREFACE

At the AHO Conference, held in September 2018 in Harare, Member States approved the Strategy and Plan of Action for Integrated Child Health. The Strategy and Plan are an ongoing effort to support and expand the concept of integration of actions within health systems and services, and at the family and community levels in the Region. One of the principal goals is to accelerate progress towards reaching the Strategic Development Goals (SDG), to reduce child mortality by two-thirds by mitigating environmental risks and applying integrated actions based on the social determinants of health. This work will contribute to advancing the agenda of building national health care systems using an integrated set of primary health care, evidence-based, and high-impact interventions to achieve the well-being of children and the full potential of human development.

Attainment of the SDG in Africa remains a key priority for Member States because women and children play a decisive role in development. Investing more in health, growth, and development is not only the right thing to do but also helps in the achievement of peaceful, stable, and productive societies. Children need an integrated mix of interventions and essential services provided by health systems which function well. Many African countries are making progress in reducing deaths in children under 5 years of age because of the widespread use of effective interventions such as vaccination, use of supplements, health promotion, access to high quality services, and the prevention, treatment, and integrated case management for dealing with childhood diseases.

This innovative Strategy and Plan of Action will promote a new approach to increase coverage and scale up actions in priority and high-impact countries using a multisectoral approach. This work will require that focused attention be paid to the crosscutting areas of socioeconomic equity, equity of access to health care with a focus on primary health care, gender, and cultural diversity. It must also take into consideration the provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments applicable to the health of women and children. It will also strengthen social protection interventions throughout the life-course and increase access to a qualified cadre of human resources.



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# INTRODUCTION

The children of Africa are its greatest asset, and the recognition and protection of their distinct needs and human rights is essential for effective development. The Region has made great strides in reducing child mortality and morbidity, using evidence-based interventions and new knowledge and technology. Investment in child health has been on the public policy agenda for over 40 years, and Member States have achieved better levels of integration of child health services in health facilities. However, to make such integration even more effective, national health policies, strategies, plans, as well as legislation and regulations, require renewed attention using an intersectoral, interprogrammatic, and life course approach in a manner consistent with international mandates.

Persistent social exclusion, inequalities of gender, class, and ethnicity, and pervasive inequities all have detrimental effects on children's development and constitute one of the greatest challenges in Africa. Children who lag behind developmentally in their first five years may never catch up to those who had a better start in life. Interventions that protect children and promote the maximum realization of their potential can improve cognitive and emotional development and boost educational achievement, which in turn facilitates access to productive employment, greater social mobility, and reduction of inequities in the future. New research demonstrates that some adult health and medical conditions result from predisease pathways that have their beginnings in utero or in early infancy, and that early interventions can have an impact on the prevalence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) in later life. Additionally, according to Heckman, preschool education is an efficient and effective investment for strengthening economic development and the workforce. The earlier investments are made, the quicker the returns.

This Strategy and Plan of Action proposes a framework coherent with Member States' commitments to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments and their principles and supports other Africa Health Organization (AHO) resolutions. It will expand and strengthen the continuum of care to promote the optimal development of the child; prevent and reduce the burden of disease in children younger than 5 years of age; improve child nutrition and nutritional status; improve the quality of care provided to all children; build capacity of the health care workforce; empower parents, families, and communities to support child care efforts; create social and physical environments that promote safety and good health; and strengthen collaboration among various institutions and sectors, enabling them to work more effectively.

# Background

This strategy aligns with the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Health Agenda for Africa (2015–2025), the AHO Strategic Plan (2020–2030), the United Nations Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health (2010), the AHO Gender Equality Policy, the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health (2011), and other AHO and international organization initiatives and resolutions that contribute to and directly affect the well-being of women, children, and caregivers as well as provide important resources, strategic planning, and technical and normative guidance to health personnel.

Countries face challenges in scaling up health service delivery strategies, both clinical and community-based, to achieve health goals, and in estimating the resource requirements and financial implications of these strategies, especially for excluded populations. Efforts to strengthen health systems are severely underfunded in many countries, with inadequate resources to support retention of health workers; improvement of health information systems; universal access to essential medicines, vaccines, and technologies; and sustained good governance in the sector. It is widely recognized that a strong policy, strategy, and planning framework for the health sector along with a strong and well-resourced national health plan are the foundations for effective implementation.

Progress toward reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has been inconsistent within and across countries, with frequent neglect of the poorest groups (often girls and indigenous populations) and those lacking access to education (often populations living in remote areas). Early childhood development programs have low coverage, and many child survival strategies still use a vertical approach that fails to consider the environmental conditions and other social determinants of health.

These constraints are major obstacles to meeting the needs of children, improving their living conditions, and protecting their fundamental rights, and to achieving greater equality among different social sectors with respect to child health.

# Situation Analysis

Although Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a low and middle-income region, it is the most unequal region in the world with regard to income. Countries in Africa face increasing challenges of poverty. According to estimates based on household income, in 2008 some 33% of Africa's population was living in poverty, and around 13% lived in households with incomes insufficient to satisfy their basic nutritional needs. One of every three children living in extreme poverty is deprived of more than one of the fundamental rights whose absence constitutes poverty. Along with material deprivation, this approach to child poverty focuses on access to basic health services and other factors associated with survival, discrimination, and exclusion that affect children's psychosocial development.

Africa faces new and emerging challenges due to social changes, the rising prevalence of NCDs—which are expected to continue increasing substantially in the decades to come—and demographic shifts linked to aging, urbanization, population growth, and mobility. In Africa, approximately 50% of all years of life lost are related to NCDs, whereas only 30% are due to communicable diseases and 20% to injuries.

Interventions and wellness programs to prevent NCDs can begin early in life and continue through old age, and can be scaled up to reach a large proportion of the population. These differences show the importance of addressing the social and environmental determinants of health and the persistent inequalities in access to and utilization of basic health services. Population groups living in pockets of poverty, border areas, and geographically remote places, as well as indigenous population groups have a wide range of unmet health needs that require more attention and investment.

In Africa in 2010, almost half (47%) of under-5 mortality occurred in the neonatal age group. Of these neonatal deaths, 31% were due to infections and 29% to asphyxia. Deaths in the post neonatal age group (from 1 month to 1 year of age) accounted for 29% of total under-5 mortality; principal causes include acute respiratory infections (48%), diarrheal diseases (36%), and undernutrition (9%). In the Americas, suffocation was the leading cause of death among children less than 1 year of age, and drowning among children aged 1 to 4. The majority of childhood deaths are preventable. In countries with high mortality, selected high-impact, low-cost interventions could reduce the number of deaths by more than 50%, but levels of coverage for those interventions are still unacceptably low in most low- and middle-income countries.

It has been shown that mortality in children under 5 years of age is associated with child abuse and with violence against women by an intimate partner. Alcohol and substance abuse are common risk factors usually present in one or both parents in such situations. There is sufficient evidence in the scientific literature to state that child maltreatment can be prevented. Children who either experience violence directly or witness violence between their parents are at higher risk of a number of negative health outcomes, including psychological and behavioural effects. Violence affects communities and societies, leading to losses in the business sectors and increased burden on the health care and justice systems. Once children reach the age of 5 years, the most significant threats to their survival are injuries, both intentional (homicide, child abuse, or collective violence such as war) and unintentional

(road traffic injuries, burns, poisoning, and falls). Finally, depression in a parent, especially a mother, can also affect the development of the child. The proper diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems in parents is therefore essential.

The prevalence of child malnutrition in Africa is high. However, chronic malnutrition is still one of the most common growth disorders, with nearly 90 million children under the age of 5 years who suffer from this condition. Rates of breastfeeding and complementary feeding practices, essential for healthy growth and development, are far from optimal. In Africa only 58% of newborns are breastfed within the first hour after birth, and only 44% of infants less than 6 months of age benefit from exclusive breastfeeding. It is estimated that promotion of exclusive breastfeeding and adequate complementary feeding practices can prevent 19% of under-5 child mortality. In addition, childhood obesity is one of the most serious public health challenges affecting countries of Africa, particularly in urban settings.

Children in Africa also die from a number of largely preventable environment-related causes. Evidence increasingly shows that environmental degradation, harmful chemicals and toxic metals such as lead and mercury, radiation, air and water pollution, asbestos, and second-hand smoke pose major threats to the health, development, and survival of the world's children. These problems are exacerbated by increasing urbanization and by the effects of

climate change. Environmental conditions affect the quality and availability of food, as well as levels of physical activity. Indoor air pollution from solid fuel use is a neglected problem that requires urgent action. In seven countries of the Region, more than 50% of the population uses solid fuels.

The estimated coverage of antiretroviral drugs for prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission was 54% in 2008. However, this figure masks significant in-country variances, with low coverage in certain population groups. Access to infant diagnostic services is still limited and many infants are lost to follow-up before their HIV status is confirmed.

Soil-transmitted helminths infect millions of young children across Africa. The illnesses caused by these intestinal parasites, including anaemia, vitamin A deficiency, stunted growth, and malnutrition, among others, slow children's mental and physical growth and have long-term effects on educational achievement and economic productivity. Parasitic worms disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged groups, particularly in rural areas and urban shantytowns, and contribute to keeping vulnerable people trapped in a cycle of poverty. Fortunately, there are highly cost-effective, proven interventions to treat intestinal parasites. Deworming interventions can easily be integrated into various existing programs that many countries and their partners are already implementing in the areas of health, nutrition, immunization, education, water and sanitation, and income support.

Africa has problem with poliomyelitis, endemic measles and rubella viruses, and efforts to eliminate neonatal tetanus and congenital rubella syndrome as public health problems. Diphtheria and pertussis are currently control: vaccine coverage with DPT3 for children under 1 year was 90% in 2009. New vaccines such as rotavirus and pneumococcus are being introduced.

Children with disabilities are among the most excluded groups and face serious barriers to the full enjoyment of their human rights. Eighty percent of the brain's capacity develops before 3 years of age. The developmental period from birth to primary school presents numerous opportunities to implement prevention programs that enable children with disabilities to fully realize their potential.

# Proposed Strategy

The Strategy and Plan of Action for Integrated Child Health builds upon Member States' accomplishments and experiences and on initiatives implemented by a wide range of partners in development. Horizontal cooperation and a South-South approach will be encouraged. Implementation will require the participation of existing alliances that are working to achieve the MDGs and improve child health and development, and will follow the accountability framework and indicators proposed by the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The conceptual framework for the Strategy is based on the ecological model, which considers child health to be the result of interaction between factors related to health systems at different levels and the social determinants of health. This work will require coordination among various social and governmental sectors, including the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, to ensure strong health sector governance, equitable delivery of services, sufficient financing of the health system, a critical mass of well-prepared health workers, functioning information systems, and availability of medicines and technologies.

A Plan of Action is proposed to guide countries in developing policies and programs to help families and communities access a timely, adequate, and integrated set of services to protect children's rights and promote their development. This set of services would constitute a portfolio of entitlements composed of cost-effective and evidence-based interventions, using a primary health care strategy and a gender, intercultural, and right-to-health approach. The Plan of Action will support and encourage the preparation of national policies, plans, and laws for social protection and contribute to strengthening health systems that are responsive to the needs of women, families, and children and that ensure access without financial, geographic, or social barriers.

To achieve this degree of support, the cooperation of many entities in both the public and private sectors will be required. These include national and local authorities, legislatures, municipal governments and community leaders, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), professional associations, women's bureaus, and the education, environment, finance, agriculture, housing, energy, and water and sanitation sectors. We propose that AHO coordinate the regional response, with direct leadership from the ministries of health and other stakeholders. As part of the plan will be implemented in the post-MDG period, that is, after 2015, adjustments will be made in light of any new global agreements for health and development that may be formulated by national governments.

The proposal calls for establishing a Regional Alliance for Integrated Child Health to strengthen partnerships and collaboration with United Nations agencies, national and international organizations, NGOs, FBOs, civil society organizations, and so on, to promote integrated child health (ICH) interventions and mobilize resources with national partners. A National Intersectoral Working Group for ICH will be formed in each country and will develop a national working definition of "integrated child



health” consistent with the country’s policies, laws, epidemiological profile, and health system requirements. The working groups will also provide planning and technical cooperation.

The overall vision is to ensure that children younger than 5 years of age survive, thrive, and go on to lead healthy, happy lives. This means taking action to ensure a high quality of life, free of preventable diseases, disability, sexual violence, neglect, injury, and premature death, and working for the improvement of child health, the elimination of inequities, and the achievement of health equity in a manner consistent with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. We have the means and the technology; what is needed now is commitment from a wider range of stakeholders and increased funding for integrated child health.

# Proposed Plan of Action 2020–2030

The proposed Plan of Action will address five strategic areas in Africa. For all indicators, the baseline is 0 and the target is 54 countries.

**Strategic Area 1:** Developing harmonized, intersectoral, and interprogrammatic policies, national plans, and laws to protect and enhance children’s health, rights, and development.

**Objective 1.1:** To create an enabling environment for advocacy, coordination, and development of intersectoral and interprogrammatic policies and programs for integrated child health (ICH) consistent with human rights instruments of the United Nations and African Union.

*Indicators:*

- Number of countries that have established a national ICH policy, strategy, or plan consistent with their legal frameworks and regulations.
- Number of countries with an ICH program that have a medium- to long-term plan of action, with resources allocated and a focal person assigned.

**Strategic Area 2:** Strengthening integrated health systems and services and community interventions through alternative service delivery strategies, especially in marginalized areas.

**Objective 2.1:** Develop and strengthen health system capacity for the management, planning, and implementation of ICH strategies, with an emphasis on primary health care.

*Indicators:*

- Number of countries that have a national policy, strategy, or plan for strengthening the capacity of the health system to scale up effective ICH interventions.
- Number of countries with ICH programs that have developed technical guidelines and norms based on AHO/WHO models.

**Strategic Area 3:** Building competencies in the health workforce, academic institutions, and families and communities using a rights-based approach that prioritizes primary health care and takes into account gender and ethnicity.

**Objective 3.1:** To support the development and strengthening of human resource training programs for ICH.

*Indicators:*

- Number of countries with an established and operational human resource and management training program for ICH.
- Number of countries implementing ICH evidenced-based interventions using AHO/WHO tools

and materials.

**Objective 3.2:** To promote social mobilization and community participation for the implementation and expansion of effective interventions to improve ICH and the well-being of children.

*Indicators:*

- Number of countries with established mechanisms and/or strategies for promoting community participation for the implementation of intervention-based ICH programs.
- Number of countries that have an operational plan to scale up and extend to new districts the community and family component, which promotes parenting skills, social mobilization, and community participation in ICH.

**Strategic Area 4:** Strengthening the health information system and improving the knowledge base on the effectiveness of interventions.

**Objective 4.1:** To strengthen country information systems and monitoring capacity in the framework of ICH, and to strengthen the capacity of information and vital statistics systems to generate and use quality information disaggregated by sex, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic level.

*Indicator:*

- Number of countries with a national information system that delivers annual information on ICH indicators and data.

**Strategic Area 5:** Mobilizing resources, strategic alliances, and partnerships.

**Objective 5.1:** To engage in advocacy to establish and strengthen intersectoral alliances with strategic partners and mobilize international and national funds to sustain implementation and expansion of ICH activities.

*Indicator:*

- Number of countries that have established an intersectoral coordinating committee for ICH.

# Monitoring and Evaluation

This Plan of Action contributes to the achievement of Strategic Objectives (SOs) 4,1 7,2 and 93 of the AHO Strategic Plan. Additional SOs, as well as the specific Regionwide Expected Results (RERs) to which this Plan of Action contributes, are detailed in Annex C. The monitoring, assessment, and evaluation of this Strategy and Plan of Action will follow the guidelines established by the Organization. Accordingly, it will include actions to monitor and assess the indicators identified, and progress reports will be delivered at the midterm and conclusion of the Plan of Action. Countries will work with all sectors to reach agreement on a list of standardized basic indicators for ICH and share data with other international agencies using websites, regional observatories, SharePoint, portal systems, and other networks.

AHO and Member States will implement selected planning, monitoring, and evaluation tools for active follow-up of country policies, strategies, and plans using process and impact indicators, country reports, and the concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The information collected will be disaggregated by age, sex, and ethnicity to enable governments and service providers to target the most vulnerable or excluded populations. A final evaluation will be undertaken at the end of the plan in 2030.

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## Annex A

# Some Examples of Interventions for Integrated Child Health (Children Less than 5 Years of Age by Level of Influence)

### Individual

- Positive parenting
- Increase access to prenatal and postnatal services
- Early childhood development programs
- Safe sex

### Family and Community

- Safe and clean environment
- Early recognition of danger signs and referral
- Clean cook stoves for cleaner indoor air\*
- Eliminate tobacco smoke and indoor mites
- Risk communication programs\*
- Active participation of social actors implementing key family practices \*
- Pre-natal and postnatal visits to reduce child abuse

### Prevention\*

- Exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months of age
- Complementary feeding
- Insecticide treated materials
- Water sanitation and hygiene
- Hib vaccine
- Zinc
- Vitamin A
- Measles vaccine
- Tetanus toxoid
- Home visits during pregnancy

### Treatment\*

- Vitamin A
- Antibiotics for pneumonia
- Antibiotics for dysentery
- Antimalarials
- Oral rehydration therapy (ORT)
- Antibiotics for sepsis
- Newborn resuscitation
- Zinc (in acute diarrhea and severe child under-nutrition)

### Societal

- Translating the Convention on the Rights of the Child into national laws
- Promoting social, economic and cultural rights
- Providing early childhood education and care
- Ensuring universal primary and secondary education
- Reducing the availability of alcohol
- Monitoring levels of lead, mercury, pesticides, etc., and removing environmental toxins
- Control of urban air pollution\*

## RESOLUTION

### STRATEGY AND PLAN OF ACTION FOR INTEGRATED CHILD HEALTH

Having reviewed the *Strategy and Plan of Action for Integrated Child Health*;

Recalling the Constitution of the World Health Organization, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international and regional human rights instruments that set forth the right of the child to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health;

Mindful of the international mandates emerging from the World Health Assembly, in particular Resolution WHA56.21 (2003), *Strategy for Child and Adolescent Health and Development*, and Resolution WHA58.31 (2005), *Working towards Universal Coverage of Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health Interventions*, the commitments by the Member States of Africa to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), and other AHO resolutions that contribute to and directly affect the well-being of women, children, and caregivers;

Recognizing that the children of the Region of the Americas are its greatest resource, and that recognition and protection of their distinct needs and human rights is essential for effective development, and noting that national health policies, strategies, plans, and laws require renewed attention to promote the effective integration of child health services in health facilities, using an intersectoral and life-course approach based on the social determinants of health and consistent with international mandates;

Considering that this Strategy and Plan of Action propose to build upon the continuum of care to promote the optimal development of the child; prevent and reduce the burden of disease in children younger than 5 years of age; improve child nutrition; empower parents, families, and communities to support child care efforts; create social and physical environments that promote safety and good health; and strengthen collaboration among various institutions in the health and other sectors, enabling them to work more effectively,

#### RESOLVES:

**1. To endorse the Strategy and approve the Plan of Action for Integrated Child Health, and to encourage its consideration in development policies, plans, programs, and proposals, and in the discussion of national budgets, with a view to creating conditions for scaling up integrated child health interventions.**

**2. To urge Member States to:**

(a) give priority to and advocate at the highest levels for the implementation of evidence-based, effective interventions to prevent child morbidity and mortality and to reach optimum social development;

(b) support the development of integrated child health policies, strategies, and plans as part of overall national health plans, build capacity for high-quality integrated child health services, and ensure universal access to these services;

(c) promote dialogue and coordination between ministries and other public and academic institutions, as well as between the public and private sectors and civil society, with a view to achieving national consensus for the implementation of integrated child health services based on the social determinants and life-course approaches;

(d) build capacity of national and local managers for effective program planning and management of health workers in first- and referral-level health facilities to deliver quality integrated child health services;

(e) support caregivers working at the family, community, and individual levels to improve care-seeking behaviour, health promotion, and care in the home and community based on primary health care practices;

(f) strengthen health systems and health services to support implementation of quality care in a manner consistent with their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the application of innovative training processes, including distance education and other innovative models;

(g) promote the collection, sharing, and use of data on integrated child health disaggregated by age, sex, and ethnicity;

(h) establish an integrated monitoring, evaluation, and accountability system for policies, plans, programs, legislation, and interventions that will make it possible to determine the quality of care and impacts of integrated child health services;

(i) develop processes for conducting external reviews and analysis of the Plan's implementation based on national priorities, needs, and capabilities.

**3. To request the Director to:**

(a) establish a technical advisory group to provide guidance on topics related to integrated child health;

(b) provide support to the Member States, in collaboration with other international agencies and sectors, to help them work collectively to support and strengthen national plans and the implementation of integrated child health activities at the country level;

(c) promote the implementation and coordination of the Strategy and Plan of Action to ensure that activities are cross-cutting across the Organization's various program areas and different regional and country contexts;

(d) establish benchmarks directly correlated to the strategic areas in the Strategy and Plan of Action;



(e) promote and consolidate horizontal (South-South) technical cooperation and the sharing of successful experiences and lessons learned by Member States;

(f) support and maximize human resources development, capacity building, and the delivery of quality services;

(g) support the development of integrated technical guidelines and tools to facilitate implementation of the Strategy and Plan of Action;

(h) promote the establishment of national, municipal, and local partnerships with other international agencies, scientific and technical institutions, academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations, organized civil society, the private sector, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, and others, for the purpose of implementing integrated child health services;

(i) conduct midterm and final evaluations and report these results to the PAHO Governing Bodies.

## Report on the Financial and Administrative Implications of the Proposed Resolution for AHO

**1. Agenda item: 5.10 – AHO Strategy and Plan of Action for Integrated Child Health 2020-2030**

### **2. Financial implications:**

**a) Total estimated cost for implementation over the life cycle of the resolution (including staff and activities):**

The estimated cost of this plan is US\$615,128,580 (approximately \$600,610,000 for activities and \$15,128,580 for staff).

**b) Estimated cost for the 2020-2021 biennium (including staff and activities):**

The estimated cost for the biennium is \$50,650,260 (approximately \$40,550,000 for activities and \$10,100,260 for staff).

**c) Of the estimated cost noted in b), what can be subsumed under existing programed activities?**

### **3. Administrative implications:**

**a) Indicate the levels of the Organization at which the work will be undertaken:**

The work will be carried out at the country, subregional, and regional levels.

**b) Additional staffing requirements (indicate additional required staff full-time equivalents, noting necessary skills profile):**

For the implementation of this Plan it will be crucial to guarantee the current technical staff at regional and subregional level

**c) Time frames (indicate broad time frames for the implementation and evaluation):**

The proposed plan will cover 2016-2021 and requires support from AHO, partnerships, and Member States. The final evaluation will be completed in 2031 and presented to the Governing Bodies in 2032.