



Global alliance
of children's
hospitals calls
on nations to
put children
first and
foremost

TIME TO STAND UP FOR CHILD HEALTH

Children's hospitals from around the world call on governments and health systems to prioritize early and sustained investment in the health of children and young people. Children's hospitals and major paediatric centres from Australasia, Europe and North America share collective concern for the challenges facing children's health. In the words of Nobel laureate Kofi Annan, "There is no duty more important than ensuring that [children's] rights are respected and their welfare is protected." Children's hospitals call on governments and health systems to act now and fulfil this duty by investing in children's health.

30th Anniversary of the United Nations Charter on the Rights of Children

November 20, 2019 marks 30 years since the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children which states that children and young people have the right to the "highest attainable standard of health". This anniversary offers a chance to reflect on how the rights of children and young people are respected in our communities and to recommit to improving health systems so all children can thrive and unfold their potential.

"There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

*Nelson Mandela,
1918-2013*

THE URGENT CASE FOR INVESTMENT

Concerning changes in mental and physical health

Children in many parts of the world are experiencing declining health. Growing economic disparities are contributing to more children living in or near poverty, even in developed countries. Mental health is also a significant concern. Health systems around the world are documenting increasing numbers of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). The science behind ACEs is robust and long term – this generation of children and youth has problems that will follow them into their adult lives with consequences on their mental and physical health that are unacceptable.



CHILDREN'S
HEALTHCARE
AUSTRALASIA



Children's
Healthcare
Canada | Santé
des enfants
Canada



ECHO
European Children's
Hospitals Organisation



CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL
ASSOCIATION

Children and young people are also increasingly being treated for complex chronic and rare diseases at younger ages. This is partly due to advances in medical science but also to changes in individual and societal-level determinants of health, such as increases in overweight and obesity and environmental threats. Structural racism and differential access to care (especially for indigenous populations, immigrants, and refugees) also significantly impact the health of children and young people throughout the world.

Healthcare system challenges

Healthcare systems face continued and accentuated pressures from rising costs of treatment, particularly from therapies directed towards an ageing population. In this environment, the unique needs of children and young people are increasingly overlooked. Even in countries with universal access to healthcare, children and families often face a patchwork of services and limited coverage of care. Although it is improving, healthcare is still too often focused on treatment versus prevention. This is especially detrimental for children, where early life interventions can help achieve good health later in life.

Children are not little adults. The special biological, psychological, and social factors influencing child health are often neglected in health care systems focusing on adult patients. Children's voices are often not taken into consideration. While some progress has been made in engaging children and young people in the healthcare decision making process, there are still enormous gaps, especially at the policy making level.

ROLE OF CHILDREN'S HOSPITALS

Children's hospitals constitute an important component of public healthcare systems and can help address the health challenges facing children and their communities. They are anchors in paediatric healthcare delivery, providing everything from primary to highly specialized care for child and adolescent-patients with acute, complex and rare diseases. They ensure communities have an adequate and highly skilled paediatric workforce and have consistently been drivers of innovation that benefit children and adult patients alike.

Children's hospitals are also special places where children and young people are not simply seen as 'little adults' but are offered care in a child- and family-centred environment. They are places where the needs and rights of sick children are respected and taken seriously.

A CALL TO ACTION

Children's hospitals are on the front lines, caring for sick children and their families. This role uniquely positions them to help identify policy and practice solutions and play a leadership role in their implementation.

To address the urgent health challenges facing children and young people, children's hospitals call on leaders at all levels of government to:

- Develop a holistic, child-health policy framework addressing efficient strategies for prevention, early interventions and curative therapies (long-term view to advancing healthier adult generations through early investing in child health)
- Incorporate the voices of children and young people into the decision making process.
- Close the gap in health outcomes amongst vulnerable populations.
- Implement and adequately fund health policies that fully protect the rights of children and young people.

Without urgent action, this generation of children and youth will face significant health challenges into adulthood – challenges we can prevent or address. Investing now will not only help protect the rights and health of children and young people, but it will support the health and well-being of society as a whole.

Examples of the health challenges facing children and young people

1 in 5

young people in Europe have a mental, developmental or substance use disorder.

1 in 4

school-age students in the United States have a chronic condition.

1 in 4

children aged 5-14 years in Australia are overweight or obese.

30 million

people in the European Union suffer from a rare disease, 80% of which start in childhood.

1 in 5

teens in Canada has considered suicide in the last 12 months. In Australia, the annual rate of suicide is 5 times higher for indigenous than for non-indigenous teenagers.

Most drugs prescribed for children have not been tested in children and only

6% of clinical trials

in one of the largest international databases involve children.