



## **Declaration of**

### **The 4th MENA Region Adolescent Health Conference**

Under the Patronage of the League of Arab States

#### **Adolescents' Care: Leaving no one behind**

Hurghada, Egypt  
1-3 December 2021

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fragile state of our health eco-systems and threat to health security in varying degrees across the Arab World and how it has impacted adolescents across the region in disparate ways. Multiple aspects and previous gains made in adolescent health have been interrupted and/or negatively impacted by the pandemic. Concurrently, gains and opportunities have been identified and should be leveraged moving forward.

We remind states of the necessity to systematically strengthen health systems, while ensuring a multi-sectoral approach, so as to encompass the socio-ecological determinants of adolescent health. States are also reminded of the life course lens to health and that failing to address adolescents' health needs will inevitably impact future adult health and subsequent generations. Countries' pledge and commitment to SDGs can't be achieved without closely working with young people and addressing the challenges they face. To fulfil/realize the commitments in this document, a multi-layered, multisectoral approach is recommended. It is essential to work closely with young people boys and girls, caregivers, community entities and leadership, service providers, media including social media, and policy makers from different sectors to address the multi-faceted challenges facing adolescents and also to capitalize on their potentials and capabilities. Special attention should be given to vulnerable groups of adolescents such as those with disabilities and those in humanitarian settings.

**We call on governments, civil society and the private sector to:**

- Acknowledge adolescence as a distinct period in life, with adolescent health being a specific discipline to be incorporated across sectors.
- Explicitly integrate adolescents' health and well-being needs, including nutrition, mental health, sexual and reproductive health, violence and injury prevention and psychosocial support in national COVID-19 response and services-continuity plans.
- Adopt equity-based policies and strategies that are inclusive of all adolescents and address the key determinants of adolescent biopsychosocial health, wellbeing, and development i.e., "*adolescent health in all policies*", including in times of crisis.
- Adopt adolescent health policies and programs that promote gender equitable norms and empower adolescent girls and boys through building their social and cognitive skills.
- Adopt a comprehensive adolescent health strategy that meets adolescents needs in regular times and crises alike- including in humanitarian and conflict-affected settings.
- Recognize the fact that learning, education, and health are deeply intertwined, and therefore, through strong collaborations between Ministries of Health and Education, support each and every school to be a health promoting center, i.e., a foundation for developing and achieving young people's full capabilities and potential to support a healthy physical, mental, emotional, and social life, with the focus being on the outcomes.
- Capitalize on all settings of adolescent learning (formal, non-formal, and informal) to integrate aspects of health promotion and prevention.
- Take active measures to educate adolescents about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in formal, informal, non-formal education, and work

settings and in manners that are culturally sensitive. Educating caregivers and community leaders about SRHR through outreach programs is also essential.

- Take serious steps in making available, accessible and gender-responsive adolescent mental health services, with specific urgency in conflict/humanitarian settings, where the double burden of conflict and the pandemic are associated with increased distress and widening of the gender gap even further.
- Promote access to quality adolescent-friendly sensitive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and psychosocial support (PSS) services and monitor utilization among countries through using appropriate indicators.
- Take action in healthcare systems' reform, so as to increase the age limits of pediatrics practice to at least 18 years in order to be inclusive of adolescents in a developmentally appropriate manner, develop transition clinics, and concurrently build healthcare professionals' capacities in adolescent health and medicine.
- Recognize and respond to the increasing double burden of malnutrition, i.e., overweight/obesity and the creeping appearance of eating disorders, as well as food insecurity, and prioritize awareness and capacity development of humanitarian and healthcare professionals, the community, and parents.
- Pay more attention to adolescent immunizations through implementing national adolescent immunization programs including HPV.
- Capitalize and strengthen public private partnership to increase availability and accessibility of adolescent health services and information.
- Proactively collect, report, and disseminate age and sex disaggregated data on adolescents, particularly around the SDGs' adolescent-related indicators, so that adolescents' needs are more visible and hence find their way into evidence-based policy, funding, and program implementation. There is a need to pay particular attention to the left behind categories of adolescents, especially married girls, adolescents with disabilities, survivors of age- and gender-based violence, and

refugees/IDPs and to proactively serve them through specifically designated programs.

- Expand research methodologies, topics, and regional capabilities so as to include qualitative, mixed-methods, and longitudinal methodologies; implementation science; and explore sensitive topics such as sexuality, gender identity, suicide and self-harm.
- Leverage digital technologies to reach adolescents and youth, including accessing services across borders, while considering ethical and legal frameworks.
- Identify and address adolescents' emerging digital health needs and equip them with the required knowledge and skills to prevent and/or manage potential harmful practices and safety matters related to digital technologies.
- Support positive parenting practices and intergenerational dialogue through the provision of services to support parents and caregivers.
- Combat all forms of violence against adolescent boys and girls including bullying, domestic violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation.
- Recognize that adolescents and youth are true change agents and *genuinely* involve them in active and transformative participation, as opposed to merely a 'token' or 'checklist' participation. This means involving them in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs that affect their lives.

Finally, in view thereof, we fully endorse the call for the “Global Summit on Adolescent Wellbeing” in 2023 called upon by the World Health Organization and the United Nations agencies, which aims at driving impact and investments in adolescent health and wellbeing at country systems' levels.