

WHS 2022



Insights from the World Health Summit (WHS) 2022

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FIRSTS were a theme at the annual World Health Summit (WHS) 2022 International Conference, which welcomed over 60,000 participants, attending both online and in-person in Berlin, Germany. For the very first time, the WHS was delivered in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), and the inaugural Virchow Prize for Global Health, an international award honouring outstanding achievements in addressing global health challenges, was awarded.

At over 775 years of age, Berlin is famous not only for historical landmarks such as the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin Wall, and several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, but also food, music, science, and a diverse culture. During the Summit's opening ceremony, several speakers attested to the leadership that Germany has shown in research and in strengthening the global health architecture. Additionally, reflecting the musical background of the city, the opening ceremony also included a musical interlude by two musicians trained in Berlin and Hanover.

The conference took place across 3 days and saw over 400 speakers from 100 nations. The Summit was attended by a diverse group of key leaders and professionals across different sectors, who discussed the developments and challenges that 2022 held for global health, as well as how to take healthcare to the next level on a global scale.

The Summit was chaired by Axel Pries, President of the WHS and Dean of Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Germany, and Catharina Boehme, Chef de Cabinet at the WHO, Geneva, Switzerland, and moderated by Spring Gombe, Principal for Policy and Advocacy, Market Access Africa, Germany, and Kenya. Pries was proud to share the partnership with the WHO, stating that the initiative aimed “to bring together the eminent visibility, power, and relevance of the WHO with the dynamic team of the WHS.” Boehme reiterated Pries' sentiments, stating that the “WHO is honoured to be a co-organiser.” Boehme also discussed the challenge of the pandemic, but highlighted the lesson learned: “We can take on global threats, only together.”

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and that partnership is essential in the face of several ongoing crises including war, disease, and climate change. Boehme also praised the host nation, stating: “Germany has shown outstanding leadership in its commitment to multilateralism, strengthening the global health architecture, and fostering a world that works together to solve pressing problems.” Boehme then introduced and welcomed Olaf Scholz, Federal Chancellor, Germany, to open the WHS 2022.

Scholz spoke of Germany’s history in research, highlighting the recent award of the 2022 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine to Svante Pääbo for work regarding human evolution. The Federal Chancellor discussed how Pääbo has been engaged in research and education in Germany since the 1990s, reflecting the “quality of Germany as a research hub.” Scholz detailed the merits of basic science, stating that “basic research matters” and how, without this research, tackling global health problems would be far more challenging; highlighting the link between Pääbo’s work and the chromosome variant that increases the risk for severe COVID-19 infection, and how other basic science research has led to rapid development of vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Scholz also discussed how Pääbo’s work shows the importance of co-operation across national boundaries and sectors, highlighting how the WHS is a forum for such collaboration, which will be necessary to help achieve earlier detection and prevention of future health crises alongside digital innovation.

Looking towards the future, Scholz reflected on how we can impact change by drawing on conclusions from the past, and appealed for everyone to join in “drawing the right conclusions from the COVID-19 pandemic”: that preparedness matters. By acting on lessons learned, networking, collaboration, and dedicated research, it is hoped that improving preparation for future pandemics can be achieved. Scholz concluded by wishing everyone a “successful and insightful Health Summit 2022.”

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the WHO, spotlighted the theme of the conference in taking global health to a new level, detailing the three key requirements for this to be achieved: a global agreement based on a shared vision; a coherent and inclusive global architecture; and a fresh global approach that prioritises the promotion of health and prevention of disease. Ghebreyesus discussed that global health is under threat and must be defended, and shared how the conference provided an opportunity to forge the path ahead together, reinforcing the notion that co-operation, collaboration, and innovation will be needed to achieve this. Ghebreyesus concluded with the powerful statement that health is a “fundamental human right; it is not a luxury.”

Further adding to the themes of progression and preparedness, Ilona Kickbusch, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, Switzerland, led a discussion with Inger Ashing, Chief Executive Officer of Save the Children International, London, UK, and Helga

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Mutasingwa, Youth Representative and Medical Doctor, Global Youth Mobilization, Tanzania, Africa, on the topic of the future generation and taking global health to the next level. Ashing discussed how the impact of several crises, including the global pandemic, climate change, and cost of living crisis, has either halted or worsened decades of progress made in global child health. Ashing added that investment in early warning and anticipatory action to prevent crises before they happen is required, as well as investment in building resilient systems and supporting health and education systems. An impactful statement from children and young people involved with Save the Children International was delivered by Ashing, where these young people ask that policy makers look beyond national interest, work in partnerships, draw inspiration from innovation, take responsibility, and act with urgency. Mutasingwa added that the voices of young people need to be listened to and hopes that moving forward young people can be meaningfully engaged in healthcare systems.

Gombe discussed networks and collaboration in global health, and highlighted a quote from Macky Sall, President of Senegal and Chairperson of the African Union, calling for a new global health order that looks to “overcome the reluctance and deconstruct the narratives that persist

in confining Africa to the margins of decision-making circles.” In terms of taking global health to the next level, the needs and voices of all continents should be heard and considered in building a resilient and fit for purpose global health architecture. Sall reiterated several other leaders in their message, highlighting that the world must be better prepared for future health crises and work collaboratively to achieve the goals of improving global health.

Additionally, António Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations (UN), New York City, New York, USA, highlighted how the pandemic set back efforts in implementing the 2030 sustainable development goals and revealed a lack of preparedness for managing global health crises. Guterres stated that, moving forward, recalibration of multilateralism and employment of global collaboration is needed.

With a focus on equity, Mark Suzman, Chief Executive Officer of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Seattle, Washington, USA, spoke passionately on the sustainable development goals. Suzman noted that to regain the progress lost to the COVID-19 pandemic, support for innovation and collaboration is necessary. Suzman further discussed polio eradication, which “remains a constant threat to children’s health” in endemic regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Suzman detailed the ongoing



work into polio eradication, the status of global polio infections, and announced the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation pledge to the global polio eradication initiative. Suzman then introduced Bill Gates, Co-founder of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, who appeared via video message. Gates gave thanks to Germany for their “strong support of polio eradication efforts” and highlighted that the threat can be ended if we work together. Gates commented that polio eradication was close, concluding with: “Now it’s up to all of us to get the job done.”

This year saw the inaugural Virchow Prize for Global Health, which was awarded in-person to John Nkengasong, U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator and Special Representative for Global Health Diplomacy, U.S. Department of State, USA, for their outstanding work on addressing complex global health challenges, on 15th October 2022. Initiator of the prize, Detlev Ganten, Virchow Foundation for Global Health, Berlin, Germany, spoke with the first laureate of the prize to understand what receipt of the award meant. Nkengasong commented that they were honoured, and felt that the history of Virchow speaks to how a multidimensional approach to solving global health problems should be undertaken. During their discussion, Nkengasong poignantly concluded that global health is about everyone, and the importance that all voices should be heard.

Core topics covered over the course of the Summit were architecture for pandemic preparedness, climate change and planetary health, digital transformation for health, food systems and health, global health for peace, health systems resilience and equity, and investment for health and wellbeing. The first day of the conference saw a multitude of panel discussions, workshops, and global health insight sessions covering a variety of topics from Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan, outsmarting pandemics, and planetary health to global efforts to end HIV and AIDS, and the European Global Health and One Health Strategy. The second day saw a focus on pandemic preparedness, global health architecture, equity, and sustainability; and the final day featured sessions on technology and digital innovation, antimicrobial resistance, and food security.

Next year’s WHS will take place in Berlin, Germany, from 15th–17th October 2023. Until then, please enjoy our feature articles from this year’s conference, which focus on the innovative topics of achieving a global health data space and using digital tools to transform disease prevention, which will be key in ensuring global health is taken to a new level by promoting the paradigm shift to disease prevention and health promotion needed, as highlighted by Ghebreyesus.