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Ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all  
at all ages

### **Statement submitted by the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council<sup>1</sup>**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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<sup>1</sup> The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA), in line with the special theme for the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Population and Development, recognizes that not only health but also access to it in a safe, accessible, and comprehensive manner – is a fundamental right. Furthermore, the IFMSA acknowledges the incredible efforts made by member states to continue improving the health of communities. However, many actions must be taken to meet the health-related objectives established by the 2030 Agenda and the International Conference on Population and Development and achieve the best possible state of health and well-being for all at all ages.

Despite a 49 per cent decline in neonatal mortality (between 1990 and 2017), 2.5 million newborns still die annually during their first month of life, with prematurity, intrapartum-related complications, and sepsis as the leading causes, all of which are potentially preventable through early identification of risk factors, provision of quality healthcare, training of healthcare professionals, and access to adequately equipped healthcare facilities. Additionally, it is essential to recognize that children are an especially vulnerable group in whom socioeconomic factors have an exacerbated impact, as well as facing a greater susceptibility to being victims of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse.

Adolescents and young adults face a range of specific challenges that are not being adequately addressed, as reflected in the alarming figure of more than 4,000 deaths per day globally among people aged 10 to 24. Violence stands out as one of the leading causes of death in this age group. Its effects go beyond immediate loss, as it leads to long-term consequences, such as an increased risk of mental health problems (it is estimated that 50 per cent of mental health disorders begin before the age of 14), sexually transmitted infections (over 1.7 million adolescents living with HIV), adolescent pregnancies (approximately 12 million girls aged 15 to 19 and 777,000 girls under the age of 15 become pregnant each year), reproductive health problems, and communicable and non-communicable diseases. Moreover, numerous reports show that adolescents find health services neither understandable nor accessible, as they are not adapted to their needs, making it difficult to access and properly utilise these services.

The ageing population also faces specific vulnerabilities. As people age, they may become more susceptible to a range of health and social issues. The ageing process carries a higher risk of chronic diseases and mental health problems, which demands a comprehensive healthcare approach that addresses both physical and emotional well-being. According to estimates, by 2050, the global population over 60 years old will double, reaching 22 per cent of the total. However, neither healthcare systems nor professionals are prepared for this, as infrastructures are not adequately equipped and healthcare services for older adults are very limited. Additionally, the design of healthcare systems is highly fragmented and does not provide a holistic approach to the ageing process.

Furthermore, we must recognize the tremendous efforts made by various stakeholders in the digitalization of health systems, as this tool demonstrates incredible benefits for achieving more sustainable healthcare and has reshaped the relationship between healthcare professionals and patients. However, IFMSA, emphasises the importance of adopting an approach that includes all population groups, as currently, one-third of the global population does not have access to the Internet. Additionally, there is a digital divide between different generations, which may further hinder access to healthcare services for older adults.

At IFMSA, we place special emphasis on sexual and reproductive health services, which include maternal and newborn health, family planning, and the prevention and treatment of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), among others. Currently, it is estimated at the global level that more than 257 million women are not using safe and effective family planning methods, primarily due to a lack of information and access to the necessary healthcare services. In this context, we highlight the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as a key tool for equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to protect not only their own health but also the health of others, as well as to make informed decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health. Furthermore, evidence shows that CSE has very positive outcomes in the communities that receive it, including increased condom use, a decrease in unsafe sexual practices, delayed initiation of sexual activity, and more. However, IFMSA recognizes that CSE should be guaranteed by public health authorities while also acknowledging the critical role played by Non-Governmental Organisations in this area.

Therefore, the International Federation of Medical Students Associations' calls on Member States, International Organizations, and the Healthcare System and Workforce to:

- **Expand and improve healthcare infrastructure:** Invest in the construction, modernization, and enhancement of healthcare facilities, ensuring that they are accessible and safe, as well as equipped to provide quality medical care at all stages of life.
- **Strengthen national health policies and commitments:** Prioritise health as a fundamental right, ensuring equitable access to healthcare for all populations, especially for the most vulnerable groups such as newborns, children, adolescents, and older adults.
- **Improve data collection and monitoring, as well as transparency with the data:** Strengthen data collection systems to assess and monitor health outcomes, allowing the identification of at-risk populations and ensuring evidence-based policy decisions. Furthermore, facilitate data sharing with international organisations and adjust policies when recommended, ensuring that no one is left behind.
- **Advocate for universal health coverage,** ensuring that healthcare services are affordable, accessible, and of high quality, especially for vulnerable populations, while strengthening global initiatives to provide access to vaccines, essential medicines, and the prevention of health issues, particularly among adolescents and older adults.
- **Encourage and implement social participation at all stages of life** in the design, implementation, and evaluation of health policies and programs. Meaningful youth engagement should be a priority.
- **Invest in prevention and early intervention in health:** Improve and invest in vaccination programs, screenings, and health education to prioritise the early identification of risk factors and potentially preventable health problems, especially for newborns, children, and adolescents.
- **Continue making efforts to advance the digitalization of healthcare systems, focusing on ensuring that its benefits reach all populations, regardless of socioeconomic context or age.** This involves ensuring that platforms are accessible, as well as developing and implementing digital training for all population groups, including the most vulnerable.

- **Ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education:** Integrate comprehensive sexuality education into national curricula, empowering young people with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health while eliminating accessibility barriers, especially in vulnerable communities. Additionally, train healthcare professionals to address sexual and reproductive health in a non-stigmatizing and non-discriminatory manner.
- **Strengthen health services for adolescents and young adults:** Design and implement youth-centred health services that address their specific needs, focusing on mental health, sexual and reproductive health, and violence prevention, ensuring these services are accessible, inclusive, and tailored to their needs.
- **Implement policies to support the ageing population:** Develop policies to address the specific health needs of older adults, focusing on healthy ageing as a priority, as well as the training of healthcare professionals in this area, enabling them to provide personalised care.
- **Expand access to family planning services:** Ensure that all women and girls, especially those living in underserved communities, have access to safe, effective, and affordable family planning methods and the support and information needed to make informed decisions about their reproductive health.

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations urges joint actions among all stakeholders in a united and multi-sectoral manner to continue advancing the improvement of health and well-being for populations of all ages, ensuring that no one is left behind. Only through collective action will we be able to achieve this goal.

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