



Annual business meeting and technical conference 2022

Local-level policy recommendations: operationalizing a One Health approach

Political statement of
the WHO European Healthy Cities Network





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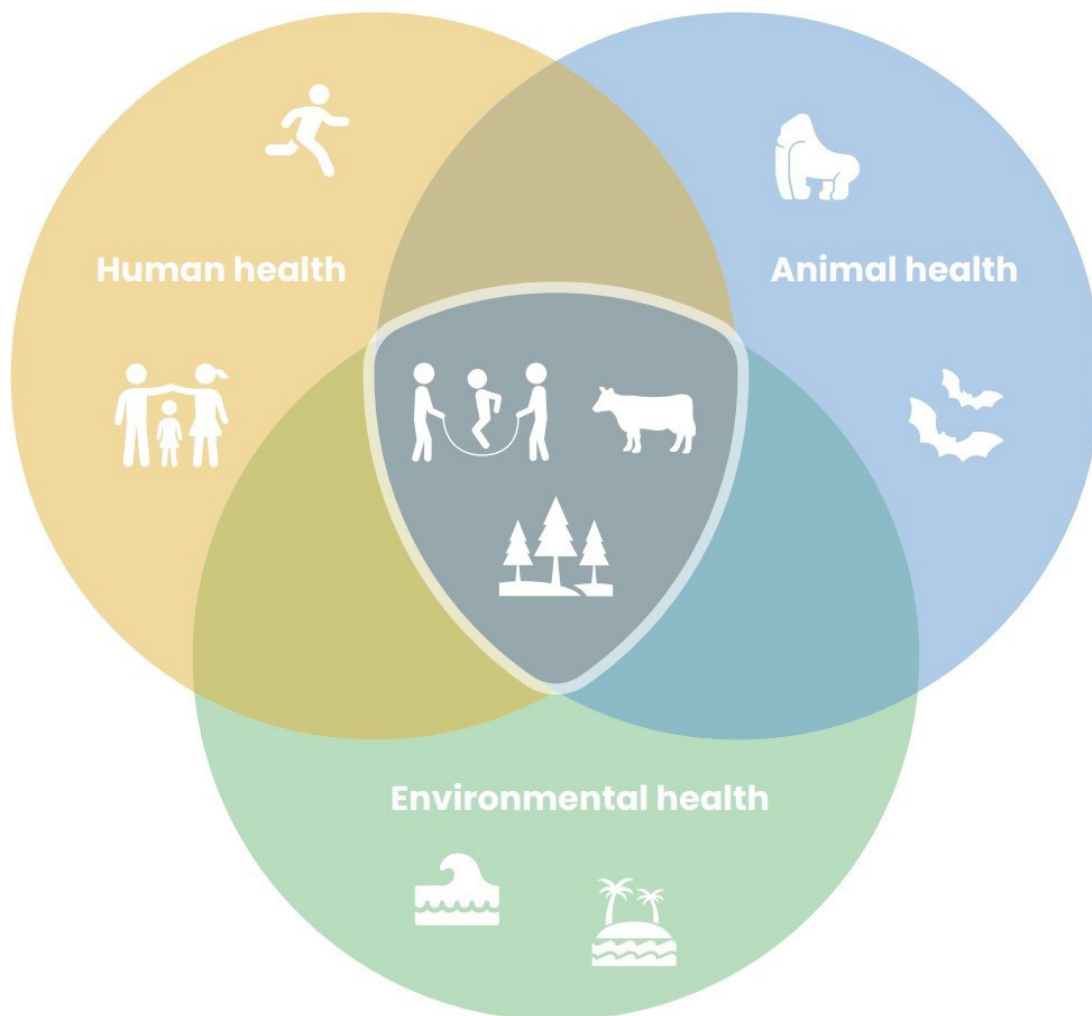


We, the mayors and senior political representatives of cities, gathered on 22–24 November 2022, confirm our commitment to the values and principles of the Healthy Cities movement.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded us of the complexity of the public health challenges we face today – challenges that no one sector, group of stakeholders, city or country can address on their own: we cannot solve them in isolation. These challenges require a multisectoral approach and cooperation among multiple stakeholders – in other words, shared challenges require shared solutions and responses.

One Health is defined as an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals and ecosystems. The One Health approach requires mobilizing multiple sectors, disciplines and communities at different levels of society to work together and to foster well-being in accordance with the call of the Sustainable Development Goals for integration across sectors.

Fig.1: One Health connects the human, animal, and environmental health¹



¹ A health perspective on the role of the environment in One Health. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; 2022 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/354574>).

One Health is not a new concept, but it needs to be redefined in the 21st century given the importance of the interdependence of human, animal and environmental health accompanied by escalating environmental changes.

The One Health approach is gaining renewed traction and high political attention in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and now features prominently in the priorities of the G7, G20 and European Union and in the work of multiple United Nations agencies. Within WHO, the recommendations of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development have heightened the commitment of Member States in the WHO European Region towards operationalizing One Health at the national, subnational and local levels. This is precisely because there is recognition that a One Health approach can be cost-effective and highlights the benefits of health promotion, disease prevention and preparedness over cure. Well-being economies feed strongly into this approach, with their aim to direct resources towards multisectoral approaches that deliver not only particularly on well-being but also equity, inclusion and sustainability to ensure that no one is left behind.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic remains a challenge with no end yet in sight, the pandemic has also reminded us of the importance of readdressing previously known disparities regarding the distribution of health and determinants of health in populations and, by doing so, improving resilience and preparedness. Although the burden of disease in European societies is largely linked to noncommunicable diseases, the COVID-19 pandemic has made societies acutely aware of the potentially detrimental effects that new infectious diseases can pose to societies. Mpox, another zoonotic disease, has recently been declared as a new public health emergency of international concern. In these challenging times, people's livelihoods and health, including mental health, have been widely and often disproportionately affected. It is imperative that we advance impact-driven interventions and seize the opportunity to invest in and scale up the One Health approaches at the local level, building on the best available data, evidence and practice each time. This will require promoting bolder local policies and stronger governance and coordination across multiple sectors, systematic integrative surveillance systems and data sharing, more investment in research and in human capacity and physical infrastructure – to prevent future pandemics and prepare for effective responses to health and environmental emergencies and long-term challenges connected to public health across the WHO European Region.

We recognize the interconnection between the One Health approach and the key themes of Phase VII of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network: people, place, participation, peace, prosperity and planet. We therefore build upon the Copenhagen Consensus of Mayors: Healthier and Happier Cities for All and reaffirm our commitment to the six key themes and to ensuring that our policies are structured around them.

We commit to operationalize One Health at the local level by pursuing a sustainable development agenda on food, environment, health systems and health literacy by also acknowledging that solid partnerships and collaboration are necessary to achieve a sustainable and healthy future.

We consider that the process of operationalizing One Health across the European Region is an essential step in aligning our mandates to strengthen cooperation and coordination between cities, sectors and stakeholders at the local level.

It is widely recognized that cities not only play an essential role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, but cities are also critical change-makers as the global community scales up efforts to operationalize One Health. The expertise of healthy cities in working across sectors adds value and strategically places them to be leading by example. Since action takes place at the local level and local governments are closest to citizens, with the most immediate and visible impact on their lives, we recognize that cities need to reinforce ongoing efforts and act now.

We, the mayors and senior political representatives of cities, recognize that involving cities as actors, levels of government closest to communities and agents that shape human habitats in operationalizing the One Health approach is critical to strengthening public health at the local level, improving resilience in populations and enhancing our ability to prevent, prepare for and respond to future crises. To operationalize One Health at the local level, we are putting forward the following recommendations.

PREVENTION

- 1. Map, innovate and scale up existing One Health initiatives and networks at the local level:** Conduct consultations at the local level to map out initiatives that successfully combine the multidisciplinary and intersectoral aspects of an approach encompassing humans, animals and the environment within and beyond the health system. Recognize, foster, innovate and celebrate these initiatives.
- 2. Increase One Health literacy across all levels:** Ensure sound understanding and recognition of the One Health approach by developing and disseminating health and safety information across sectors. Develop capacity-building initiatives to incorporate One Health approaches into training and education, with a key focus on the interface between humans animals and environmental health. Foster twinning and exchange programmes to share good practices.
- 3. Build back better by further investing in research and data across all sectors:** To effectively detect, respond to and prevent disease outbreaks of foodborne and zoonotic origin and issues related to antimicrobial resistance, share epidemiological data and laboratory information across sectors at multiple levels of government. Together, government officials, researchers and actors across sectors at the local level should clarify roles and responsibilities to implement joint activities, as needed.

PREPARATION

- 4. Strengthen the social component of One Health:** Build community engagement mechanisms to address the interface between humans, animals and the environment in an integrated manner. Listen, use and act on local voices to build trust and co-create community health and well-being.

- 5. Create urban resilience:** Lead in creating urban resilience by collaborating across multiple city departments and working with private-sector stakeholders and community leaders. It is crucial to invest and spend in ways that produce population and societal well-being for all and have infrastructure policies and strategies in place to protect and adapt cities against vulnerability, environmental stressors and uncertainty caused by weather extremes such as heat-waves, floods, cold weather, energy shortages and to prepare to meet increased migration.
- 6. Ensure the Healthy Cities' Steering Committee reflects the One Health approach:** Strengthen the intersectoral steering committees by ensuring that the relevant stakeholders and policy-makers (health sector, environmental sector, veterinary sector and food safety sector) are engaged. Recognize good practice and increase the visibility of achieved targets and goals.

PROMOTION

- 7. Promote change in food systems:** Promote and support the shift of food production and consumption towards a more sustainable and equitable pattern. Create and present solutions for producers and retailers to make healthier, more sustainable and local choices easier, increase awareness by providing information and introducing local food labeling.
- 8. Promote healthy urban planning:** Include the One Health approach in urban planning. Enable citizens by making healthy behaviour the easy choice and contribute to equal opportunities. Invest in biodiversity by creating high quality green and blue spaces. Present best practices to city developers to create affordable housing and more sustainable and resilient cities.
- 9. Promote projects and partnerships:** Celebrate achievements and milestones reached along the way of implementing the One Health approach. Increase visibility through communication mechanisms and share your achievements and challenges within networks to open discussions and gain feedback.

TRANSFORMATION

- 10. Transform collaboration across jurisdictions and on multiple governance levels:** Work with all sectors of local government to integrate the One Health approach through multiple levels of government including local, subnational and national authorities.

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The WHO Regional Office for Europe

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