



Global launch: 'Making Every School a Health Promoting School' initiative

Over 90% of primary school age children and 80% of lower secondary school age children are enrolled in schools around the world, a place where they spend roughly a third of their time. Schools have therefore been recognised as a unique setting for both teaching and reinforcing lifelong healthy behaviours. Despite these opportunities, global mortality and morbidity estimates indicate that school-age children are receiving suboptimal health promotion and care services.

To capitalise on this gap in service delivery, on 22nd June 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) chaired a virtual meeting covering their 'Making Every School a Health Promoting School' initiative. The initiative, which is projected to serve over 2.3 billion school-age children, focuses on the formal development and promotion of the Global Standards for Health Promoting Schools. The United Nations (UN) agencies hope that these global standards will pave the way to achieving the WHO's 13th General Programme of Work target by 2023, "1 billion lives made healthier".

Introductions from WHO and UNESCO highlighted the opportunities that school delivery systems can bring, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic where governments have been driven to rethink and adapt education systems. The pandemic has raised important questions on how to connect health, wellbeing and learning more closely, with the two UN agencies noting that it is no longer acceptable that any school is not a health promoting school.

The webinar was split into three sessions. Session one emphasised the key messages featured above while also highlighting that only a handful of countries have successfully implemented the Health Promoting School Approach first articulated in 1995 by WHO, UNICEF and UNESCO. The session then covered the launch of the global standards for Health-Promoting Schools,¹ a resource package including four documents – the global standards, implementation guidance, case studies and WHO guidance on school health services.

Session two took the form of a panel discussion featuring the voices of Lovel Kappini and Elena Hakobyan, students from Zambia and Armenia respectively, Elena Sevostyan, an English teacher from Belarus, and Nehe Sharma, School Principal of the Delhi Public School India. Between them, the panellists outlined the need for universal healthy food provision in schools via methods such as hot meal provision or school gardens, greater guidance on healthy lifestyles, such as community-based service linkage or school camps, and comfortable and safe learning environments, ensuring adequate mental and emotional health.

Session three featured experiences from those working in countries aligned with the Health-Promoting Schools initiative as well as a discussion with partner organisations – UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), Save the Children, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation and Academic Partners. Collectively, these testimonies commented on the need for scaling up the initiative, COVID-19 mitigation, integration with other national health initiatives and the need for standards to be both localised and evidence-based.

In summary, despite the successes observed in health promoting within schools, there remain opportunities to improve upon global health objectives. Developing formal global standards is an avenue for success as it is no longer acceptable that any school is not a health promoting school.

Moderators: Selim Razek, student, Vibeke Jensen, UNESCO and Ruediger Krech, WHO.

Speakers: Anshu Banerjee, WHO; Lovel Kapini, student; Elena Hakobyan, student; Elena Sevostyan, English Teacher; Nehe Sharma, School Principal; Nnaniki Makwinja, Ministry of Basic Education, Botswana; El Kashef, Medical Doctor; Suphat Champatong, Ministry of Education, Thailand; Luwei Pearson, UNICEF; Jutta Neitzel, WFP; Susan Sawyer, academic partner on Health-Promoting Schools.

¹ <https://unescochair-ghe.org/2021/06/24/unesco-and-who-urge-countries-to-make-every-school-a-health-promoting-school/>

Research consortium for school health and nutrition: Launch

In January 2020, almost one in every two primary school children worldwide received a meal every day at school. By April 2020, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in roughly 370 million children missing out on what had often been their only dependable meal of the day.

Considering this, in May 2021, the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), in conjunction with a group of member states and partners and financed by the World Food Programme and Dubai Cares, launched a global Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition.¹ The consortium aims to help countries to re-establish, increase and improve school health and nutrition programmes, providing a safety net for children, creating human capital and promoting economic development. Through the development of a 10-year independent research strategy, the research consortium will address and share strategic research for evidence-based decision-making on school health and nutrition.

At the high-level, public launch, prominent figures within the field spoke on the coalition's action goals and highlighted how these would be supported by the consortium's identified research priorities. Professor Baron Peter Piot, LSHTM Director and keynote speaker, chaired an initial policy-focused discussion prior to a presentation of the Global Research Consortium being delivered. Professor Anne Mills, LSHTM Deputy Director and Provost, then chaired a discussion on three topics of interest: 'The Importance of Data Quality in Decision Making', 'The Importance of a Multi-Sectoral Approach to Research' and 'The Role of School-Based Programmes'.

¹ <https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/research/centres-projects-groups/research-consortium-for-school-health-and-nutrition#welcome>