

Ensuring Healthy Lives and Well-Being for All

Topic Background for the General Assembly on Ensuring Healthy Lives and Well-Being for All

“There can be no real growth without healthy populations. No sustainable development without tackling disease and malnutrition. No international security without assisting crisis-ridden countries. And no hope for the spread of freedom, democracy and human dignity unless we treat health as a basic human right.”

- Gro Brundtland, Former Director-General of the World Health Organization

What is Good Health and Well-Being?

The onset of the COVID-19 **pandemic** has led the world to a collective focus on good health and well-being. For some, communal good health and well-being are expected in their society, with most people able to access doctors, medicine, or hospitals and health clinics if needed. However, for many others, good health and well-being aren't necessarily guaranteed in their society, with millions of people around the world having limited access to doctors, nurses, or medicine. The **World Health Organization**



A young woman receives a vaccine, a critical preventive medicine

(**WHO**) defines health as “complete physical, mental, and social well-being”, which indicates that the topic of health has many different parts, each important to a person's overall health.

First, **physical health** refers to whether a person is sick or hurt. This category includes everything from access to doctors and medicines, access to clean water, healthy and affordable food, **maternal** and child health, and **vaccines**. Physical health can also be impacted by the spread of **communicable diseases**, exposure to hazardous materials and **pollutants**, and access to adequate and affordable health care among many other topics.

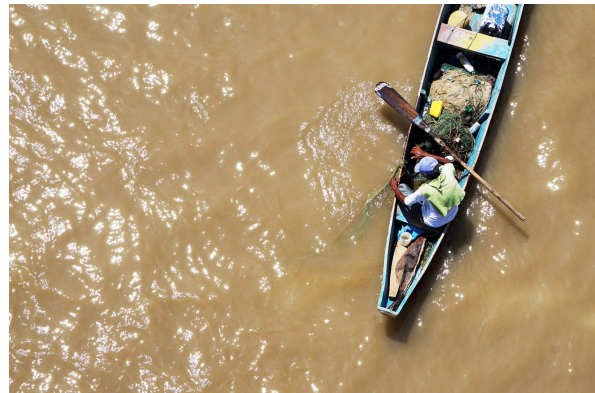
Mental health is another very important aspect of good health and well-being. Mental health refers to a person's emotions and thoughts, and it is as important as physical health to an individual's overall health and well-being. Finally, **social health** is the ability to hold meaningful relationships with other people, including friends and family. A fundamental quality for all human beings is the need for close personal relationships in order to be happy and achieve good health and well-being.

Although mental and social health are very important, the Jr. Model UN program is going to focus on the physical health and well-being of people around the world. In addition, the Model UN program is going to focus on more than just the coronavirus pandemic, even though that's an important part of global

health. Even before the pandemic, there were major obstacles to achieving good health and well-being for millions around the world. For example, climate change, conflict and war, and natural disasters all threaten the health and well-being of millions around the world every day. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to make other critical health topics even more challenging by directing attention and funding away from these important issues.

Why is Good Health and Well-Being Important?

Good health and well-being are the fundamental building blocks for **robust** economies, prospering societies, and strong communities. Promoting healthy lives and well-being not only allows people to live happy, healthy lives, free from illness and suffering, but it also is necessary for **sustainable development**. Healthy citizens need access to healthy food and clean water sources, access to quality education, employment opportunities, and the opportunity to innovate. Unhealthy communities means that there will be more people staying home sick or in the hospital, and fewer people available to hold critical jobs necessary for economic growth and development. Illnesses, like **malaria**, and especially those illnesses that affect children, can significantly harm growth, meaning that children have less energy, time, and opportunity to focus on their education, be creative and play, and create goals for their future.



Clean water is one of the most important aspects of good health and well-being

A lack of good health and well-being both creates and **perpetuates** inequalities. **Developing countries** on average have much higher maternal and child **mortality rates**, deaths related to preventable and treatable diseases, and an insufficient number of healthcare workers **per capita**. There is currently a 31-year gap between the countries with the longest and the shortest **life expectancies**,¹ highlighting how wide the equality gap is among countries and how critical good health and well-being are to a country's development.

However, health inequalities do not only exist between countries, they exist within countries as well. Even the most prosperous countries, like the United States, are not free of problems related to good health and well-being. While **developed countries** generally have higher life expectancies and usually do not experience the threat of communicable diseases nearly as severely as developing countries, great inequalities in health and well-being can exist within these developed countries' populations. In the United States, for example, millions still lack access to affordable, adequate health care. In Canada, the average infant mortality rate is 5 deaths per 1,000 births, which is very low in international standards. But in the Nunavut region, where 85% of the population is **indigenous people**, the infant mortality rate rises dramatically to 16 deaths per 1,000 births.² Thus, it is important to address issues concerning good health and well-being both within a single country *and* among all countries.

¹ United Nations Development Programme: SDG #3, Good Health and Well-Being
<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-3-good-health-and-well-being.html>

² International Institute for Sustainable Development: Healthy Lives and Well-being for Everyone
<https://www.iisd.org/articles/healthy-lives-and-well-being-everyone-why-sdg-3-matters-and-how-we-can-achieve-it>

Discussing and researching the topic of good health and well-being can be emotionally difficult, especially in a time when so many people have been personally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. But it is critical for the overall development of the world and the pursuit of reduced inequalities that everyone becomes more educated on these issues and works collectively to solve them. The world is at a crucial turning point for increasing global awareness around public health and the seriousness of prioritizing well-being for all. The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to shine light on the significant role good health and well-being play in not only sustainable development, but the basic functioning of the global economy and governments, and the delivery of essential social services. The pandemic has already caused money and resources to be redirected from vital programs and projects that promote good health and well-being. Finding a balance between handling the pandemic and ensuring that it does not cause these programs and projects to **backslide** is one of the biggest challenges the world is facing today.

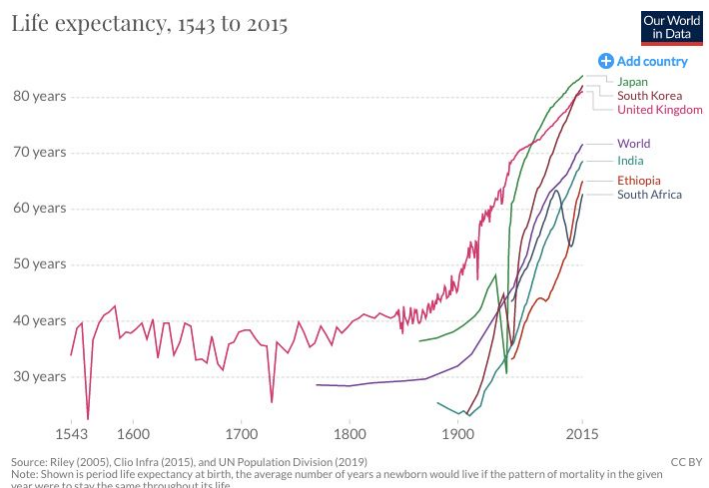
International Efforts to Improve Good Health and Well-Being

For decades, a number of international organizations, like the United Nations, the World Health Organization and Doctors Without Borders have been leading efforts to raise global standards of health, especially in countries with less developed economies and unstable governments. These organizations often provide **direct assistance** to citizens, in the form of doctors, medicine, and important vaccines.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the international agency in charge of directing and coordinating international health programs. The WHO directly funds programs that administer essential services including the training of doctors and nurses, provision of life-saving vaccines, and other critical projects. The **United Nations (UN)** is an international organization, composed of over 190 **sovereign countries**, dedicated to enhancing global peace and security, and promoting health and well-being. The UN acts as a coordinating organization that gathers all **member states** together in order to combat global crises by setting Sustainable Development Goals and specific Targets for each goal (more on this below).

Each country of the UN has unique challenges to the health and well-being of their citizens. Some member-nations struggle to combat communicable diseases or child mortality, while others, like the United States, confront inequalities in their health systems. Although the two organizations have different missions and structures, they often work together in order to boost global health and well-being.

Through the work of the UN and the WHO, global health has improved considerably in the past 100 years. For the majority of human history, the single greatest threat to an individual's health was **unsanitary** drinking water and diseases that resulted from unsanitary living conditions. In the early 1900s, significant attention went to ensuring people had reliable access to clean water and that sewage was properly disposed of, resulting in incredible increases to



Life expectancy over time. Life expectancy grew significantly after polluted water was linked to illness and disease.

average life expectancy. Another instance of successful global health programs has been the **eradication** of deadly communicable diseases, such as smallpox, and the attempts to eradicate malaria. These successful programs prove that global cooperation can improve the physical health of millions around the world.

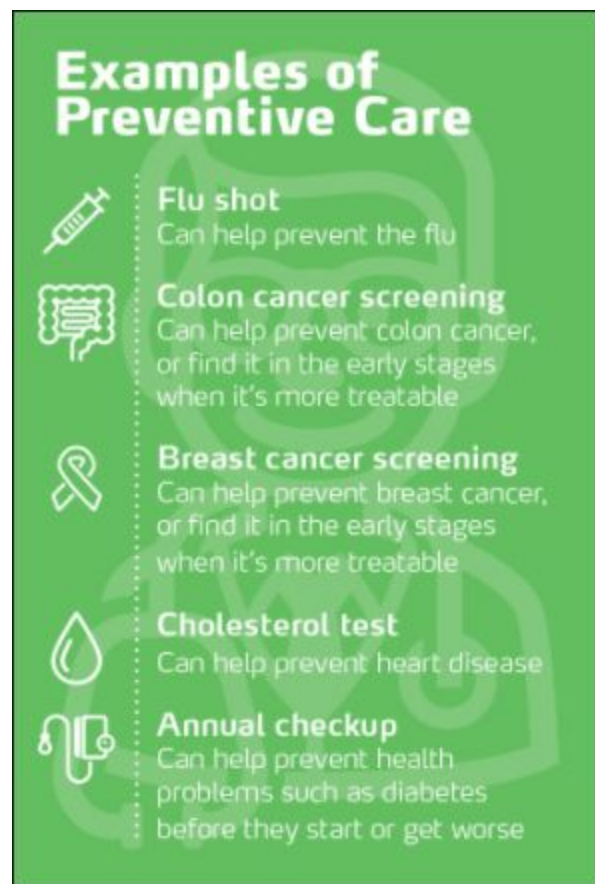
Just as each country has a unique set of challenges to the health of their citizens, each country also has a unique set of goals in order to achieve better health. The WHO helps to ensure that developing nations have the resources they need to meet these goals. Founded on April 7, 1948, just three years after the end of World War II, the WHO has 194 member states across the world. Each year on April 7, the day of its founding, the WHO celebrates **World Health Day**, which serves as an opportunity to focus worldwide attention on important aspects of global health. World Health Day 2020 was the Year of the Nurse and the **Midwife**. The WHO's work is based on the principle that "all people should enjoy the highest standard of health, regardless of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition."

The Challenge of Ensuring Good Health and Well-Being for All

The global effort to improve health and well-being has never been more important, or more challenging than right now. International efforts to improve global health have had a number of successes over the past 100 years, yet billions around the world suffer from poor health or a lack of access to healthcare services. As mentioned before, health disparities within countries also exist and threaten the lives of millions around the world. Even with these challenges, the charge for world leaders remains the same: increase global health and well-being for all.

Preventive medicine is one of the best ways to ensure that people stay healthy. Preventive medicine attempts to prevent or stop diseases and illnesses before they start, rather than letting someone get sick before treatment begins. For example, it is much cheaper and more efficient to encourage someone to change their diet and exercise routine than it is to treat the difficulties associated with obesity, diabetes, or heart disease. Likewise, it is always better to vaccinate children against deadly diseases, rather than to wait for them to get the disease before treating them. Promoting preventive medicine is one of the medical communities main strategic goals.

Every country has its own unique **health system**, the combination of doctors, nurses, hospitals and other services that are available to sick people. Some countries have very strong health systems, where sick people have access to great doctors, hospitals or health clinics. Other countries have poor health



Preventive medicine - Options to reduce illness and disease before issues arise

systems, where many people, especially the lowest-income individuals and those living in rural areas, have little access to quality doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals. Under-funded health systems means that sick people will be unable to get the medical attention they need, leading to **preventable death**. One of the main challenges to world leaders is finding ways to build quality health systems, especially in developing countries, while providing citizens all of the pieces necessary to achieving good health and well-being.

Fortunately, there are a number of immediate actions that world leaders can take to increase good health and well-being. In developing nations, leaders can boost overall health by increasing immunizations, increasing access to doctors, medicine, and health clinics, training health workers, promoting health education, increasing access to healthy food and clean water, and eliminating hazardous and polluting environmental factors. In developed nations, leaders can improve health and well-being by expanding health coverage to more people, eliminating hazardous and polluting environmental factors, and promoting preventive medicine.

Clearly there exist a number of challenges that public health experts and government leaders must combat in order to increase health and well-being. Which solutions governments and international organizations pursue is an extremely important question. Due to limited financial and medical resources, choosing a particular issue to focus on, often means that other issues cannot be properly funded. Effectively managing resources, programs, and projects and targeting those groups of people most in need, are incredibly important in order to promote good health and well-being and reduce global inequalities in living standards.³

The most effective solutions to issues related to good health and well-being will be **interdisciplinary**, weaving in creative ways to tackle other components of sustainable development, like gender equality or climate change. An example of such a solution comes from the **United Nations Development Programme's** (UNDP) recent work in the Central African country of Chad. Chad has an average life expectancy of only 54 years, and has a greatly inadequate number of health facilities in proportion to its population. The UNDP recently built a number of solar-powered health clinics that can offer quality, basic services like care for expectant mothers, childbirth services, medication storage, and response to public health issues like malaria, and now COVID-19.⁴ This project is an example of how countries and international organizations can tackle issues related to good health and well-being while also tackling other issues, like climate change, that stand in the way of sustainable development and reducing global inequalities.

United Nations Targets: Goals for Promoting Good Health and Well-Being

The United Nations recognizes that the topic of Good Health and Well-Being is complicated and involves a number of important sub-topics. In 2015, the United Nations adopted seventeen **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, which set broad goals and guidelines to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. SDG #3, "Ensure Healthy Lives and Well-Being for

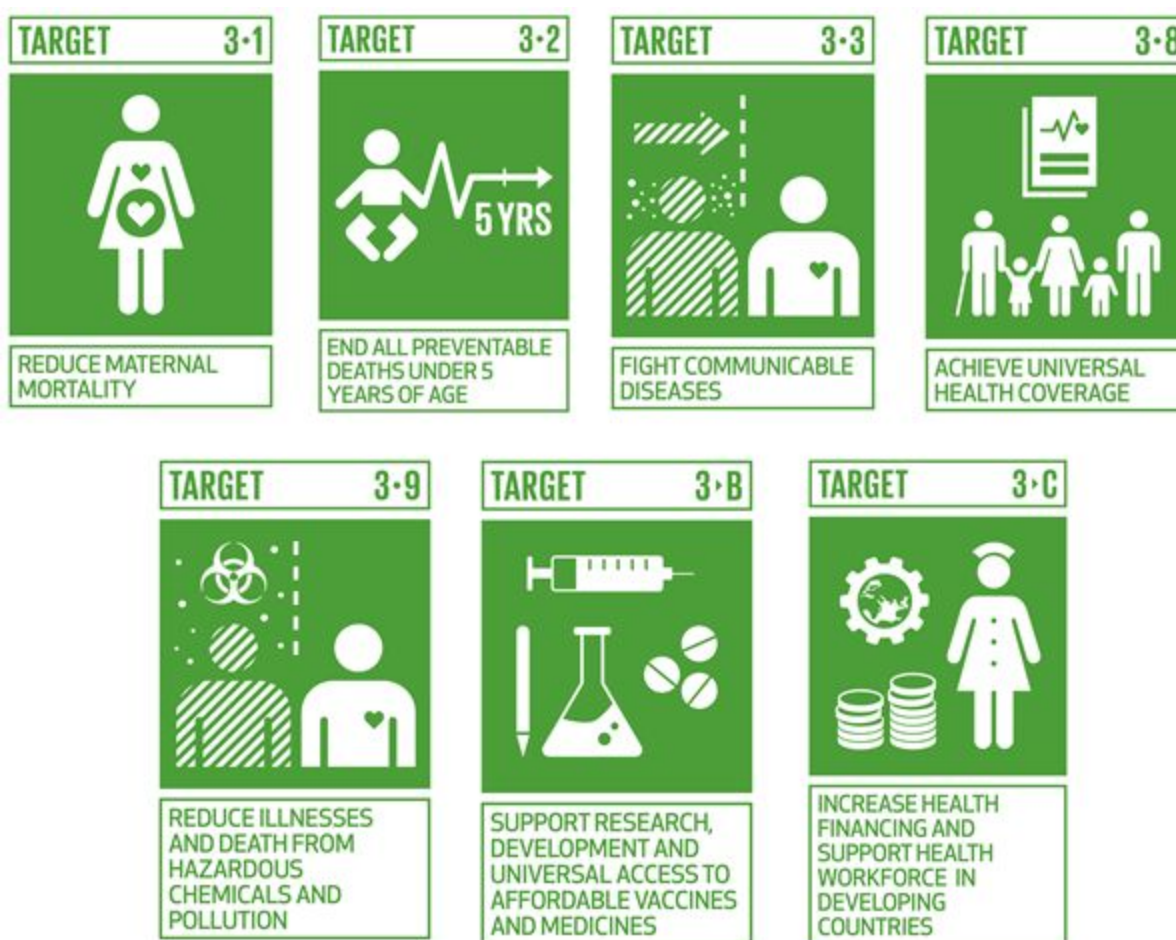
³ Global Health - Our World in Data - <https://ourworldindata.org/health-meta>

⁴ UN Powers Health Clinics in Chad - UN Development Programme - <https://medium.com/@UNDP/undp-powers-health-clinics-in-chad-111b24a59236>

All at All Ages,” acknowledges that promoting good health and well-being is essential for sustainable development and underlies other key components that are critical for peace and prosperity, such as education, economic growth and the opportunity for decent work, gender equality, and reducing inequalities.

Each SDG is broken down into smaller, more specific goals called Targets. These Targets help international organizations and countries focus their work related to the SDGs, and develop actionable goals. Breaking the SDG’s down into more clear-cut targets is necessary for analyzing core issues and potential solutions.

For the 2020-2021 Student Diplomat / Jr. Model United Nations Program, each school will be assigned one set of Targets below to study in detail from the perspective of their assigned country. More information about specific Targets can be found in additional 1-2 page topic-specific briefing papers that student delegates will read depending on which Target subcommittee they are assigned.



Questions to Consider

1. Define good health and well-being. What does good health look like to you?
2. Although this program will focus primarily on physical health, why are mental and social health important parts of overall good health and well-being?
3. What is preventive medicine? Why is it better to prevent illness and diseases rather than treat the illness or disease when it starts affecting someone?
4. What are the major health related issues in your assigned country? What are some potential solutions to those health issues?
5. What is the World Health Organization? How does the World Health Organization improve global health and well-being?
6. What is the relationship between socioeconomic inequalities and good health and well-being?
7. How does the COVID-19 pandemic impact our ability to fight other health related issues? Which health-related issues are made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Term	Description
Backslide	To go backwards in progress, to undo successful programs that have already been put in place.
Communicable diseases	A communicable disease is one that is spread from one person to another through a variety of ways that include: contact with blood and bodily fluids; breathing in an airborne virus; or by being bitten by an insect.
Direct assistance	Money given from one country to another such as a gift, grant or loan.
Developing countries	Countries that do not have complex economic systems, often relying on agricultural, mining or other natural resources for economic activity. Often these countries are poorer and seek to grow their country by advancing their economic systems and infrastructure.
Developed countries	Often referred to as an industrialized country, a developed country is one with a complex economy and advanced technological infrastructure.
Eradication	The complete and permanent worldwide reduction to zero new cases of a disease through deliberate efforts.
Globalization	The increased interconnectedness and interdependence of peoples and countries.
Health System	All the activities whose primary purpose is to promote, restore and/or maintain health. For example, the people, institutions and resources, arranged together in accordance with established policies, to improve the health of the population they serve.
Humanitarian Organizations	Groups that provide aid and assistance to people that need help due to conflicts, displacement, natural disasters, or other environmental factors.
Immunization	The process whereby a person is made resistant to an infectious disease, typically by the administration of a vaccine.
Income	Money received on a regular basis for work.
Indigenous people	those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. For example, the Lakota in the United States or the Mayas in Guatemala.

Interdisciplinary	When something relates to, and includes information from, multiple academic topics or sectors.
Life expectancies	A measure of the average time an organism is expected to live, based on the year of its birth, its current age, and other demographic factors including gender.
Malaria	A disease caused by a parasite that commonly infects mosquitoes who then feed on/bite humans. People who get malaria are typically very sick with high fevers, shaking chills, and other flu-like symptoms.
Maternal	Feelings often felt by mothers and characteristics associated with motherhood.
Member states	The term used for a country that is a member of an international organization, such as the United Nations.
Mental health	Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being and it affects how we think, feel, and act.
Midwife	Midwives are healthcare professionals who help women stay healthy during pregnancy, help women give birth and care for you and your baby in the first few weeks following the birth.
Mortality rates	The number of deaths in a given population during a defined time period of time.
Pandemic	The worldwide spread of a new disease.
Per capita	The amount of something per person in a specific area. For example, the number of hospitals per capita in a country.
Perpetuates	To make something last without a foreseeable end.
Physical health	The ability to perform daily tasks and live comfortably in one's body.
Pollutants	Any substance, as certain chemicals or waste products, that renders the air, soil, water, or other natural resource harmful or unsuitable for a specific purpose.
Prenatal	Relating to a baby before or recently after birth.
Preventable death	The UN Sustainable Development Goals hope to stop all preventable deaths by 2030. Preventable deaths are deaths that could have been stopped, have someone had access to or received proper medical care.
Preventative medicine	Preventive medicine is focused on preventing disease, disability and death, as opposed to treating it.
Robust	Having or showing a lot of power and strength.
Social health	Social health can be defined as our ability to interact and form meaningful relationships with others.
Sovereign countries	Sovereign countries have a permanent population, defined territory, one government and the capacity to enter into relations with other sovereign states.
Sustainable development	Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)	Also known as Global Goals, these build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and aim to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new Goals are unique in that they call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet.
United Nations (UN)	An international organization, composed of over 190 sovereign countries, dedicated to enhancing global peace and security, and promoting health and well-being.
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	The United Nations Development Programme is the United Nations' global development network. It promotes technical and investment cooperation among nations and advocates for change and connects countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life for themselves.

Unsanitary	Unclean enough to endanger health.
Vaccines	A vaccine stimulates your immune system to produce antibodies, exactly like it would if you were exposed to the disease. After getting vaccinated, you develop immunity to that disease, without having to get the disease first.
World Health Organization (WHO)	The World Health Organization is a department under the United Nations that “directs and coordinates international health within the United Nations system” and works with countries, governments, and organizations to attain health related goals around the world.
World Health Day	World Health Day is celebrated every year on April 7th and is sponsored by the World Health Organization, Each year, World Health Day highlights a specific health theme. For example, 2020 was the year of the nurse and midwife.