



ACTION FOR GLOBAL HEALTH

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INTEGRATION FOR CHILD HEALTH: KEY MESSAGES

SEPTEMBER 2014

The Action for Global Health Child Health Working Group is a group of NGOs within the Action for Global Health network of development and health organisations. The working group advocates for better policies and programmes to improve child health outcomes and access to health services in the developing world.

Key messages

- * Addressing the leading causes of child mortality and morbidity requires strong national and international leadership to support and strengthen health systems to deliver comprehensive and integrated child health programmes at all levels of care.
- * The health of children is influenced by a range of inter-linking factors, which include those directly relating to the healthcare system (access to care, quality of care), as well as those relating to the environment (such as water, sanitation and hygiene, and indoor air pollution), housing, education and nutrition. Addressing the root causes and consequences of child health therefore requires an integrated approach that puts children, rather than interventions, at the centre.
- * Integrated approaches deliver a range of interventions in a coordinated and joined up way that the address multiple needs of children across the continuum of care through collaboration within the healthcare system and across a variety of sectors that affect health outcomes. Integration can be defined on multiple levels;
 - **Addressing multiple diseases together:** Many of the risk factors and determinants of major childhood diseases are the same, therefore the solutions to improving child health are often similar and overlap. For example, addressing the lack of access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices, can lead to improvements in undernutrition, diarrhoeal diseases and pneumonia - all leading causes of death and disability in children. Addressing multiple diseases together is the most efficient and cost-effective way to reach more children with multiple complementary interventions and address mortality and morbidity together;
 - **Integrating prevention and treatment:** coordinating and bridging primary health care and public health care interventions to ensure the delivery of a comprehensive package of care;

- **The continuum of care through time and place:** both the coordination and continuity of care across different ages and periods of time across reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health; and the appropriate linkages and referral through the different levels of the health system from the community to primary health care at health centres, through to higher levels of care provided at district and national hospitals;
 - **Integration across sectors:** coordination and joint delivery among different sectors and agencies to comprehensively respond to the burden and causes of disease. For example, the SAFE (surgery, antibiotics, facial cleanliness, and environmental improvement) strategy provides a framework for collaboration and coordination across WASH and health sectors for preventive and curative interventions to eliminate blinding trachoma.
- * Child health is a cornerstone of development and a vital driver of equity. Investing in the lives and wellbeing of children is a platform for sustainable progress on other areas of development.
- * The first few years of life are recognised as the most important in terms of a child's health and physical development, as well as their cognitive and social-emotional development. Early Childhood Development (ECD) acknowledges the need for implementation of cross-cutting interventions – integrating health, nutrition, education, water and sanitation, and child protection – in a consolidated and collaborative manner.
- * The evidence for how best to implement ECD and integrated child health programmes is growing, however there is urgent need to expand this evidence-base through ensuring successful programmes are evaluated, documented and shared to improve understanding on effectiveness, efficiency, impact, value for money and health outcomes. This evidence needs to be generated through high-quality, operational research, supported by donors, partners, academia and national governments.
- * Diagonal approaches can deliver a win-win for child health outcomes and health system strengthening objectives by harnessing the power of targeted interventions, such as immunisation programmes, to advance progress towards universal health coverage. By integrating disease-specific interventions with health planning and health policies, this approach can drive investment and improvement in health system development including specific building block functions such as health workers, access to medicines and other commodities, health information systems and health financing.



Recommendations

- * Implementers should expand and support the evaluation and documentation of integrated approaches to child health through implementation research to improve effectiveness, efficiency and results.
- * Donors should promote country-led rather than donor-driven strategies to strengthen ownership and implement child health programmes that focus on local needs and priorities by ensuring funding supports existing national plans.
- * National governments must develop national plans and strategies which promote an integrated approach across the continuum of care, including the prevention and treatment of multiple diseases, within and across all relevant sectors.
- * All stakeholders must ensure that key child health interventions are aligned conceptually, programmatically, financially and along institutional lines, in order to maximise child health outcomes.
- * All stakeholders should ensure child health programmes focus on improved health outcomes of children, prioritising the impact of health programmes on overall reductions in child mortality and morbidity, rather than outputs.



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Action for Global Health (AfGH) is a broad European network of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) advocating in Brussels, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain and the UK towards the right to health for all and the health Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

AfGH calls on European decision-makers to increase their support for fair access to healthcare and fully funded, strong health systems which are accountable and responsive to the needs of vulnerable and poor people.



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