



Foreword

As part of its mandate to monitor and report on the health of nearly 900 million people in the WHO European Region, the WHO Regional Office for Europe issues this report as its flagship publication, every three years. The 2009 European health report focused on the role of health systems in contributing to health, approaches to strengthen health systems' functions based on cost-effective interventions and performance assessment, and referred to the 2008 Tallinn Charter: Health Systems for Health and Wealth. The 2012 European health report focuses on supporting and providing the evidence base for the strategic objectives and priorities of Health 2020, the new European policy framework to support action across government and society for health and well-being, endorsed in 2012 by European Member States.

This new European policy is the beginning of a new united fight to save not just the lives of the citizens of today's Europe but also those of generations to come. It targets the main health challenges in the 53 countries in the Region, such as increasing health inequities within and between countries, shrinking public service expenditure due to the financial crisis, and a growing burden of ill health from noncommunicable diseases such as obesity, cancer and heart disease. Its implementation will help to mobilize decision-makers everywhere, within and beyond the boundaries of the health sector. Given that so many factors affect health and that health affects so many areas of human life, progress on public health can only come from whole-of-society and whole-of-government efforts. This is why everyone has a role to play in implementing Health 2020, from prime ministers to civil-society organizations to citizens. It is also why this work requires increasing attention to and understanding of health and well-being, in addition to reducing morbidity and mortality and improving health systems' performance through such means as reaching universal coverage.

The timing of this report thus offers an excellent opportunity to provide policy-makers and public health professionals with the epidemiological evidence base underpinning Health 2020 and to outline the tools and methods to measure progress. The report also provides insight into one of the pivotal aspects of Health 2020: well-being as a marker of progress in health in the Region. Well-being

stands at the centre of the WHO Constitution's definition of health: "not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" but "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being".

This report presents the current epidemiological profile of the Region's 53 Member States and the agreed approach to monitoring progress towards Health 2020, specifically through a small set of agreed European goals (overarching targets) and proposed indicators to be further refined. The report also identifies important challenges to measuring progress towards Health 2020 and outlines a collaborative agenda to address them, with the WHO Regional Office for Europe as a facilitator and convener, working with European institutions and partnering Member States.

This report is written for policy-makers in European countries and all public health professionals concerned with the implementation of the new policy. It should also interest academic institutions, nongovernmental organizations and other groups keen to contribute to Health 2020, strengthen solidarity across Europe and reduce inequalities within and across countries in the European Region.

The report describes how the Region's 53 Member States came to agree on the set of overarching targets, which are expressed as European averages. This follows a European tradition first put into practice through the Health for All policy and continued in HEALTH21 two decades later. The report describes in detail the methods and baseline for target setting at the European level, as progress on the overarching targets will be reported at this level. Nevertheless, most actions will occur at the country level, so these details can also inspire countries to set or reset their own targets for health, reflecting their particular circumstances and starting points.

My team at the Regional Office and I are committed to reporting regularly on the progress towards the European goals for health and well-being and on our efforts to overcome measurement challenges. We will conduct annual analyses and mark progress with our first set of milestones in 2015. I am sure that the commitment of all 53 Member States to the implementation of Health 2020 will be a strong catalyst for success in Europe in the years to come.

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