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**Better health, better lives: children and young people with intellectual disabilities and their families**

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## **Scope and purpose**

The WHO Regional Office for Europe launched the *Initiative on Health of Children and Young People with Intellectual Disabilities and their families* in response to the emerging consensus that health is a key determinant of their development and social inclusion. This most vulnerable group in society has too often been subjected to various forms of discrimination and neglect, as reflected in the high rates of institutionalization still prevalent across the European Region.

The aim of the initiative is to ensure that all children and young people with intellectual disabilities are fully participating members of society, living with their families, integrated in the community and receiving care and support proportional to their needs within the scope of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Good quality health care is essential to this, as a means of reducing health inequalities, promoting good health and well-being and ensuring a successful transition to adulthood.

The WHO Conference, in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), will demonstrate Member States' solidarity and shared concern over these issues, the progress already achieved and the commitment to change. It is planned that the Conference will result in the endorsement of the European declaration on health of children and young people with intellectual disabilities and their families –better health, better lives.

The purpose of the declaration is to provide policy and practice recommendations for achieving the optimum quality of life for children with intellectual disabilities and their families by promoting and supporting good physical and mental health and well-being, eliminating health inequalities and preparing children for a successful transition through life. The priorities identified in the draft declaration are to ensure that children and young people with intellectual disabilities are protected from harm and abuse, can grow up with families in the community, have their needs adequately assessed and receive good quality health care and comprehensive community support offering them and their families involvement and choice.

The Conference will also be an opportunity to showcase examples of good practice from across the European region, particularly in relation to de-institutionalization processes, development of family support services, delivery of health promotion programmes and specialist support services, workforce development and quality assurance.

In order to facilitate the achievement of this initiative's longer-term objectives, the Conference will provide a forum for planning follow-up activities and establishing partnerships in implementing the declaration at Regional, national and local levels.