

Better Health Requires More Participation by Young People

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At this year's World Health Summit in Berlin, the WHO Youth Council presented its vision for healthier societies. The World Health Organization's Youth Council is calling on policymakers to better leverage the potential of young people. The Bertelsmann Stiftung and major youth organizations support the initiative.

Berlin/Gütersloh, October 14, 2024 – Better involvement of and support for young people is essential to creating a healthier, more equitable, and future-proof society. That is the key message of a declaration published by the World Health Organization's 25-member WHO Youth Council supported by the Bertelsmann Stiftung at the World Health Summit in Berlin. The authors of the declaration emphasized that especially younger generations are severely affected by the global crises. The WHO had only recently pointed out that numerous diseases are on the rise among young people worldwide, especially mental and sexual illnesses. In the search for solutions, it is important not only to listen to young people, but also to entrust them with an active role and responsibility.

Specifically, the WHO Youth Council is calling for more equal opportunity and inclusion in the education system and in the use of new technologies, e.g. Furthermore, healthcare should be geared more towards prevention, and people from disadvantaged groups should be guaranteed equal access to healthcare services. The authors of the declaration also call for better support for youth organizations and for empowering young people to help shape (healthcare) policy, both through new formats for participation and by being genuinely open to their positions and experiences. Besides the Bertelsmann Stiftung, international youth organizations support the declaration, including the Digital Transformations for Health Lab and the Junior Doctors Network of the World Medical Association.

"Young people make up around a third of the world's population, but are insufficiently involved in political decision-making processes," noted Bertelsmann Stiftung Executive Board Chairman Ralph Heck. "This is a problem because will be affected by the consequences of today's political decisions for a long time. If their positions are not heard, opinion-forming will be imbalanced. A strong democracy needs the voice of young people."

Brigitte Mohn, Executive Director of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, emphasized: "Health has many facets and is highly relevant to the further development and transformation of societies on all continents. We need the perspectives of young people here. They must necessarily be involved in all decisions, for example in the transition to a digital and sustainable economy, the structuring of social life in the digital age, and the development of new ways to ensure global access to education and natural resources. They are the ones who must help shape the future of their countries and take responsibility for it at a later date."

Daniela Schwarzer, Executive Director of the Bertelsmann Stiftung, added: "In healthcare as in other sectors, the major challenges can only be solved at an international level and through close cooperation. The measures described by the WHO Youth Council provide a good starting point. However, their implementation depends crucially on whether it is possible to incorporate these calls for action into the political process. This is where political decision-makers are called upon to seriously consider the proposals of our young health experts."

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