The 17 Sustainable Development Goals — also known as the SDGs or the Global Goals — came into effect on January 1, 2016 following an historic United Nations Summit in September 2015. 193 governments from around the world agreed to implement the Goals within their own countries in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

These new, interconnected goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, while also identifying new priority areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among others.

Although each country faces specific challenges in pursuit of sustainable development, special attention is given to the most vulnerable countries, in particular, African countries, less developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing states. There are also serious challenges within many middle-income countries.

For each of the 17 goals, there is a list of specific targets we aim to reach. The targets discussed in this guide have been summarized for ease of reading. For a more detailed list of all the 169 targets, visit GlobalGoals.org.
ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES

We all deserve to be healthy and able to achieve what we need in our lives. However, to ensure the health of everyone, we also need to address gaps in services, treatment and coverage for vulnerable populations too. We can do this by developing strategies to positively impact the mortality rates of mothers, children, substance users, the extremely poor and other minority groups who have difficulty addressing their health needs. Additionally, this goal seeks to improve access to universal health care, access to affordable medicines and sexual and reproductive health care services for everyone. Through improved access to health care around the world, strong research, health finance and early warning systems, we can address and reduce epidemics such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, mental health and cancer. We can measure how we’re doing by looking at population mortality rates to see if the number of new cases or the number of people dying changes through intervention programs.

TARGETS

- By 2030, the global maternal mortality rate will be less than 70 per 100,000 live births, and the number of under-five deaths as low as 25 per 1,000 births.
- By 2030, AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, communicable and tropical or water-borne diseases will be a thing of the past.
- Prevention and treatment of substance abuse will be strengthened.
- Universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services as well as safe, effective, affordable and quality general medical services will be available.
- Increase to health financing, training and retention of skilled health workforce in developing countries.

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.”

Martin Luther King Jr.
American civil rights activist
Where did it begin?

Poor health and poverty are closely linked. They are both a cause and a consequence of each other. This cycle of poor health and poverty can occur at local, national and international levels. At the local level, lack of money, lack of information, cultural barriers, geography and stigma can prevent people from accessing necessary health services. At the community national, or international level, poor health can be caused by widespread poverty, infectious diseases and lack of government social support for the poorest and most vulnerable people.

On an environmental level, overcrowded and poor living conditions can contribute to the spread of airborne diseases such as tuberculosis, and respiratory infections such as pneumonia. Reliance on open fires or traditional stoves can lead to deadly indoor air pollution. Environmental degradation caused by pollution, and overconsumption leading to lack of food, clean water and sanitation can also be fatal.

When we look at social determinants of health such as income, education, job security, food security, housing, gender, race, disability and where people are born, we can see that there is a wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of health for many people.

Why does this issue matter?

"Ensuring health and well-being for all" means working to support those most vulnerable to unequal access to health services and treatment. It is important to understand how access to health care and health literacy are impacted by the social, cultural and environmental influences of our lives. The following section will illustrate the specifics of what we mean by good health and well-being.

A safe and healthy birth for mothers and children

Giving birth can have many challenges and health risks, and this goal highlights the need for mothers and children to receive trained support to minimize the risk of complications or death during delivery.

Living through early childhood

Children under the age of five are vulnerable to disease and malnutrition. With access to proper care, vaccinations and good nutrition, children can be better protected against disease and early death.

Protection from preventable diseases

Epidemics, or rapid and widespread diseases, can be prevented and managed. Through quick and quality treatment, the risk of spreading contagious diseases can be reduced.

Freedom from addiction

Treatment, education, and support are the best ways to prevent substance abuse in our communities, and it’s important to improve access for all in need of these supports.
Knowing your body and your rights
Improving access to information and services related to sexual and reproductive health are key to improving health in general. When you can make informed and confident choices about your body, you’re flexing your right to health and well-being. Ensuring the protection of these rights can help eliminate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation.

Access to health care
Being able to find health services, vaccinations and information are essential to improving the health and well-being of our population. Ensuring safe, local access to these services is vital.

Who and what are affected?

Children
Children are most at risk of malnutrition, underdevelopment and infectious diseases for many reasons, including poverty, poor health services and lack of treatment. The neonatal mortality rate refers to the likelihood of dying in the first 28 days of life. Between 2000 and 2015, this rate declined from 31 deaths to 19 deaths per 1,000 live births. Improving treatment and access to medicine for children and their caregivers, educating individuals and communities and improving hygienic practices are the key to seeing this rate continue to decrease.

Women
Programs addressing health need to understand how unique barriers impact women’s and girls’ access to health services, education and resources. Many women in the world sacrifice their education, waged work and well-being to care for their children and families. Inconsistent or unavailable treatments for women’s health and family planning impact the overall health of women globally. While this goal seeks to ensure all women have access to health services in general, it specifically recommends women have access to sexual and reproductive health-care services including birth control, counselling and abortion or maternal services.

“Communities and countries and ultimately the world are only as strong as the health of their women.”

Michelle Obama
Lawyer, Former First Lady of the United States of America
People living in unsanitary conditions

In 2012, an estimated 889,000 people died from infectious diseases caused largely by fecal contamination of water and soil and by inadequate hand-washing facilities and practices resulting from poor or non-existent sanitation services. In the same year, household and ambient air pollution resulted in some 6.5 million deaths. From simple hand washing skills to having clean air to breathe, sanitation and hygiene are critical to our health, survival and well-being.

According to the Center for Disease Control, basic sanitation means being able to safely dispose of human waste (feces and urine), and maintaining hygienic conditions through services such as garbage collection, industrial or hazardous waste management and wastewater treatment and disposal. Investments like these take national level policies with local level investments and education opportunities to prevent unnecessary losses of life due to unsanitary conditions.

People suffering from mental health issues and substance abuse

Mental illness occurs across regions and cultures. The most common mental health issues are anxiety and depression, which can lead to death by suicide. In 2012, an estimated 800,000 people worldwide died by suicide, and 86 per cent of them were under the age of 70. Globally, death by suicide is the second leading cause of death among those between the ages of 15 and 29. Making space to discuss mental health issues and identify strategies for support and treatment is important to reducing stigma and highlighting the network of support available.

Substance abuse, or the overindulgence in or dependence on an addictive substance, especially alcohol or drugs, remains a burden for the health sector. Treatment is also inconsistent: only about one in six people worldwide suffering from drug-use disorders received treatment in 2013. Unlike infectious and communicable diseases, mental health and substance abuse can be harder to detect, for individuals and their communities alike, making them a subtler burden on our health and well-being.

4 What needs to be done?

Water, sanitation and hygiene

From dengue to diarrhea, poor sanitation and hygiene are the cause of a number of diseases for vulnerable individuals and communities. More than 33 per cent the world’s population practice open defecation or lack adequate sanitation facilities. Improving access to clean water, promoting hygienic practices such as hand washing, waste disposal and food preparation can help reduce the risk of diseases and infections. Building proper latrines and fixing old ones are also great ways to improve our waste disposal so that we don’t contaminate our communities.
• **Health care workers**

From HIV-AIDS to mental health, one of the biggest barriers to health treatment of vulnerable populations is stigma, or negative attitudes and behaviours, towards people suffering from a particular condition. Fear of infection, discrimination, violence and/or shame can impact a person’s willingness to seek treatment for their disease. Changing behaviours and attitudes towards acceptance, inclusion, respect and equal treatment can happen when we talk about the issues in a way that doesn’t judge or criticize someone with a disease or illness. One way to do this is to increase the number of trained healthcare professionals able to work with vulnerable and stigmatized individuals and communities to increase safe access to healthcare.

• **Mental health**

Addressing mental health should focus on wellness, social determinants of health and resilience for vulnerable individuals and communities. One of these vulnerable groups are refugees and asylum seekers. Moving from your home country as a result of war, oppression, violence or **famine** can severely impact mental health. Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, culture shock and depression can all contribute to poor mental health and difficulty settling in a new community.

• **Gender**

Part of the process of empowering women in their health is improving access to health-related resources. At the crossroads of sanitation, sustainability and empowerment lies the sanitary pad. For many women in developed and developing countries alike, sanitary pads and other feminine hygiene products like tampons and menstrual cups are out of reach. In India, only 16 per cent of women use sanitary pads during menstruation. One example of an organization taking action is Saathi, who use sustainable and local agriculture to harvest banana fibers to create sanitary pads for distribution in rural communities. Take a look at the work Saathi is doing in this video.

Through education and awareness, stigma reduction around female hygiene and sanitation can help improve access and discussion about these issues.

• **Environmental**

**Climate change** affects social and environmental determinants of health, including clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter. Increased drought, high temperatures, allergies and increased natural disasters can contribute to transmission of diseases and poor health practices. As a cycle, poor health practices, such as improper human waste disposal, can contribute to the degradation of our ecosystems. From policies to individual choices, there is a lot we can do to reduce our emissions and improve cleaner energy use and waste disposal. Raising awareness and sharing information about the impacts of climate change on human health can assist to reduce health vulnerability and environmental degradation. In response to the relationship between climate change and our health, the World Health Organization asked choreographer Marie Elangovan to use traditional Indian Bharatanatyam dance to advocate for more action and attention to these issues.
To build the foundation of healthy people and communities, a number of building blocks need to be in place. Our health benefits from the health of our environment. When we pollute our air, water and land, it impacts our health through disease, drought and desalination—just to name a few.

Making health care accessible is also a mission of gender equality. Improvements to health care and health literacy must support the particular needs of vulnerable populations such as women and transgender people.

Poor health is related to the outcomes of the poverty cycle. If we can address the causes of poverty by improving access to housing, stable income and nutrition, we can work towards improving the health of our bodies.

“You cannot have maternal health without reproductive health. And reproductive health includes contraception and family planning and access to legal, safe abortion.”

Hillary Clinton
Former US Secretary of State
Consequences of inaction

- Our health is linked to so many elements of our lives and our planet. If we don't address the pressing issues of climate change, poverty, gender equality, nutrition or sustainable agriculture, we will be putting our health, our planet’s health and the future generations’ health at risk.

- If we don't address the causes of poor health like clean water, sanitation, environmental degradation, gender inequality, poverty and overconsumption, we will see unnecessary loss of life and ecosystems in our lifetime.

- If we don't strengthen our research, education and awareness, we won’t be able to protect ourselves and our communities from dangerous or unhealthy attitudes and behaviours contributing to poor health.

REFLECTION AND ACTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?

2. How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?

3. How has this problem changed over time? Where do you see it going in the future?

4. What questions do you still have?