

## Call for action beyond health sector to improve health of girls and women

Despite considerable progress in the past decades, societies continue to fail to meet the health care needs of women at key moments of their lives, particularly in their adolescent years and in older age, according to a recent WHO report.

In addition to widespread and persistent gender inequities, key findings of the report are that sexuality and reproduction are central to women's health. However, women also face a number of other important health challenges, including chronic diseases, injuries and mental ill-health. For example, road traffic injuries are among the five leading causes of death for adolescent girls and women of reproductive age in most regions while suicide is among the leading causes of death for women between the ages of 20 and 59 years globally.

The report, 'Women and health: today's evidence tomorrow's agenda,' is aimed at setting out what is known about the health of women throughout their lives and across the different regions of the world, and adopts a life-course approach to better understand how interventions in childhood, through adolescence, during the reproductive years and beyond, affect health later in life and across the generations.

The report concludes with a shared agenda for women's health, with a focus on policy action in four areas: building strong leadership with the full participation of women's organisations, strengthening health systems to better meet women's needs throughout their lives, leveraging changes in public policy to address how social and economic determinants of health adversely impact

women, and building a knowledge base that would allow better tracking of progress.

Source: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)

## G8 chair to press for financial regulation and improved health of the poorest women and children

In a special address to participants at the recent 40th World Economic Forum Annual Meeting in Davos, Switzerland, Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper outlined his country's priorities as president of the G8 this year and host of the G20 Toronto Summit in June as including the proposal of a major initiative to improve the health of women and children in the poorest regions of the world.

Canada will champion an initiative to mobilise G8 governments, NGOs and the private sector to reduce child mortality rates, raise health care standards and improve the well-being of women and children in the world's most vulnerable countries.

'We must find that unity of purpose,' said Harper.

Source: [www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org)

## Call for elimination of female genital mutilation

A call to eliminate female genital mutilation as a gross form of violence against women has come from the World Medical Association (WMA) and the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO).

To mark the international day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (6 February), the two organisations strongly condemned the medicalisation of female genital mutilation.

Professor Gamal I Serour, president of FIGO, said: 'Death, severe pain, haemorrhage, tetanus, sepsis, recurrent urinary tract infections, pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, increased complications of subsequent pregnancy and childbirth, as well as adverse psychological and sexual effects are just a few examples of its extreme consequences. The practice of female genital mutilation violates human rights principles.'

Dr Dana Hanson, president of the WMA, said: 'The medicalisation of female genital mutilation is a matter of deep concern for us. It blatantly infringes the code of medical ethics. Physicians should need no reminding about the acute dangers of female genital mutilation to discourage them from performing or promoting such practices.'

According to the recent WHO report on 'Women and health,' in Africa an estimated 92.5 million girls and women above the age of 10 years are living with the consequences of female genital mutilation, of which 12.5 million are girls between 10 and 14 years of age, and each year some three million girls are subjected to female genital mutilation. It appears that there have been small decreases in the extent of female genital mutilation in recent years. However, the data indicate a growing tendency for female genital mutilation to be carried out by health professionals, a decline in the average age at which it is performed, and a marked increase in the proportion of girls who undergo female genital mutilation before the age of five years.

Political, legal and social interventions are needed to eliminate female genital mutilation, among other harmful practices.

Source: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)