

PREVENTING THE NEXT PANDEMIC: THE CASE FOR INVESTING IN CIRCULATORY HEALTH



The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating physical, mental and fiscal impact on the millions of people living with circulatory health problems who have a higher risk of severe illness and death from the virus.

In addition to older age, people living with CVD, stroke, obesity, diabetes, kidney disease, and hypertension are at a particularly greater risk from severe forms of COVID-19 and its consequences.

Simultaneously, the burden of COVID-19 and the measures necessary to retard its progression have had a significant impact upon health systems and our patients' ability to access vital medical care facilities such as primary care, dialysis, acute services or after care and rehabilitation.

Finally, emerging evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of COVID-19 survivors are at increased risk of adverse circulatory health outcomes.

As the chief representatives of the global circulatory health community and patients, the Global Coalition for Circulatory Health (GCCH) calls on WHO Member States to adopt a Framework Convention or similar instrument on Emergency Preparedness which will mitigate the impact of any future pandemic upon our patients by taking the following steps:

- Prevent, screen, and treat for circulatory conditions through coordinated national COVID-19 response and recovery plans via concerted patient co-creation and collaboration
- Increase spending and develop targeted policies to tackle CVD and NCD risk factors, including the social and commercial determinants of health, using revenues from fiscal policies (i.e., taxation of unhealthy commodities, such as alcohol and tobacco products)

- Include indicators on circulatory disease prevalence, comorbidities, and risk factors into measures of pandemic readiness, resilience, and response
- Ensure people living with circulatory conditions and in low-resource settings have good and equitable access to essential health services, including medicines, supplies and associated devices, through Primary Health Care
- Provide easy priority access to vaccination and other disease prevention methods for those with underlying circulatory risk factors
- Support and integrate the use of effective new models to deliver quality health services
- Invest in research to improve understanding of determinants and on developing sustainable and scalable models of integrated long-term response to emerging health challenges.

With meta-analysis indicating that hypertension, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, and thrombotic complications being both the most prevalent and most dangerous co-morbidities in COVID-19 patients, the world simply cannot wait for the next pandemic to invest in circulatory health.

Yet there is reason for hope: the 2019 UN Political Declaration on Universal Health Coverage provides a strong framework for building more resilient health systems, with explicit calls for investment in circulatory health-related non-communicable diseases and references to fiscal policies that put such investment firmly within reach.

By further cementing the importance of addressing circulatory health in a future Framework Convention on Emergency Preparedness, WHO Member States can take concrete steps towards a pandemic-free future. ■