

**- Building a Sustainable Health Workforce -**

# **CALL FOR ACTION**

*on Interprofessional Collaboration  
and Education*



International  
Pharmaceutical  
Students' Federation  
European Regional Office



**IFMSA**  
International Federation of  
Medical Students' Associations

**A collaboration between IPSF and IFMSA**

## **Background:**

A robust health system is needed to ensure that the best quality health care services are delivered to the patients and therefore health systems must be sustained by a motivated and trained health workforce. In fact, as the complexity of health care services grows, services become increasingly dependent on the competencies of more than one profession, requiring multi-professional teams of health-care providers (1). A Health Workforce can be defined as the health care professionals (including dentists, doctors, nurses, nutritionists, pharmacists, psychologists, etc) and all people who assist with the functioning of health systems (administrative assistants, hospital managers, ambulance drivers, etc).(2)

***Services become increasingly dependent on the competencies of more than one profession, requiring multi-professional teams of health-care providers***

According to the European Commission, by 2020, with no effective measures there will be a potential shortfall of around 1 million healthcare workers in the EU. The Health Workforce situation is not an issue that only relates to Health Professionals, but to us, health students and the future Health Workforce, who play a vital role in the decision-making process and the strategies that can tackle this complex issue. In line with this, the World Health Organisation's "Global strategy on human resources for health: Workforce 2030" recognizes that "diversity in the health workforce is an opportunity to be harnessed through strengthened collaborative approaches to social accountability, interprofessional education and practice, and closer integration of the health and social services workforces to improve long-term care for ageing populations." (3)

***Shortfall of around  
1 million healthcare workers***

As we can clearly see, Interprofessional Education is highly connected to the sustainability of our Health Workforce and Health Systems, therefore requiring a comprehensive and coordinated approach to tackle all threats aforementioned.

In 2014, the WHO launched its first guidelines for transforming and scaling up health professionals' education and training at the Third Global Forum on Human Resources for Health. These guidelines identify nine areas for action, one of them being interprofessional education (IPE) as an important factor in ensuring a sustainable health workforce. Therefore, the health system must be working in harmony to provide proper and accessible care, reliable supply of medicines and technologies. In order to achieve these goals, different professionals must work interdependently to ensure patient-centred care. With this in mind, the WHO developed the Framework for Action on Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice (3), that not only highlights the current status of interprofessional collaboration, but also identifies the mechanisms that shape successful collaborative teamwork and outlines a series of action items that policy-makers can apply within their local health system.

In fact, successful interprofessional education provides the necessary tools for future health care professionals to be comfortable to work with other professions and to optimize the skills and expertise of each member, which allows health systems to be more robust, to provide better health care and to ensure higher patient safety.

According to the WHO, interprofessional education occurs when students from two or more professions learn about, from and with each other to enable effective collaboration and improve health outcomes. Interprofessional education allows students to learn about the different health care professions and their role in health systems. This allows students from different courses, as future professionals that will be working in the same health care facilities, to understand each other and create the basis for future collaboration-friendly environments. Only by coming into contact with interprofessional settings in Academia, can health students be prepared to embrace a collaborative working environment. Thus, universities, teachers, health care organisations, federations and associations representing health care students and professional organisations should strive to provide opportunities for students to nurture an understanding for other professions. The end goal of this approach is not only for students to learn together, but also learn how to work together.

**The Health Workforce crisis is not the only threat we are facing, but falls alongside antimicrobial resistance, climate change, patient safety and non-communicable diseases. With all the threats that our health systems face, only through a strong multidisciplinary approach can we solve these common challenges, guaranteeing the efficiency, sustainability and best possible health outcomes of our health-care.**

To conclude, at a time when the world is facing a shortage of health workers, all of us have to work together, health students and professionals, in order to ensure a sustainable future Health Workforce that can tackle the needs of the communities it serves and that builds towards achieving Universal Health Coverage, truly leaving no one behind.

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## **Call to Action:**

Therefore, we call on:

### **On Governments to:**

- Improve and incentivize the collection and analysis of reliable data on Health Workforce in terms of needs, demand and supply at a national level, as well as to ensure the tracking of migration trends;
- Promote political commitment to Interprofessional Collaboration, aligned between the ministries of health, education and finance, across private and public sectors and educational and training institutions, professional associations, labour unions, development partners, international organizations and civil society;
- Coordinate the development and implementation of evidence-based national health and education strategies in regards to the health workforce strategy;
- Develop concrete policies for interprofessional education, integrating the concept across health professions education, and investing in technical and financial resources towards the development of IPE Programs, including their subsequent monitoring and evaluation;
- Promote curricular reforms from the standard profession-based education to a longitudinal integrated health professions education that fosters principles of interprofessional collaborations;

### **On Healthcare Institutions and Universities to:**

- Integrate interprofessional education in their curriculum, promoting collaboration between students from different fields in the health sector and supporting research projects that are based on inter collaboration;
- Add population-oriented interprofessional collaboration competencies within their curricula to capacitate the future health workforce to better meet community needs and tackle health inequities;
- Ensure adequate allocation and institutional support to faculty development and organisation for the implementation of IPE from undergraduate to postgraduate studies;
- Promote interprofessional community-service learning as an effective model to train a collaborative-ready and socially accountable health workforce;
- Conduct extensive research on Interprofessional Collaboration and Education that can be used to drive evidence-based policy-making for governments and other relevant stakeholders.

### On **Health Students Organizations** to:

- Raise awareness of the issues related to the health workforce crisis amongst civil society, promoting understanding on the issues of shortages, maldistribution and poor healthcare delivery conditions;
- Advocate for IPE as a key to a collaboration-ready workforce, an important factor in achieving Universal Health Coverage through improved patient outcomes and safety;
- Develop community and online-based campaigns to raise awareness on the importance of interprofessional collaboration and its role on health systems;
- Actively promote the development of national interprofessional health students coalitions to promote interdisciplinarity and the one health approach through collaborative projects;
- Establish partnerships with other healthcare students organizations, in order to collaborate on advocating for proper planning of the health workforce, according to the needs of each country;
- Develop activities such as - but not limited to - workshops, lectures and conferences with other healthcare students organizations, thus promoting interprofessional collaboration;
- Actively conduct and participate in interprofessional research in order to provide evidence-based policies, strategies and guidelines which are vital in the decision-making processes for duty bearers.

### **References:**

1. Dubois & Singh, 2009; Dussault et al., 2010; Scott et al., 2011; European Commission, 2012
2. Monitoring the building blocks of health systems: a handbook of indicators and their measurement strategies; WHO, 2010
3. Framework for action on interprofessional education and collaborative practice, WHO, 2010

**Developed by:**



**International  
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European Regional Office



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