

25th Session of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

World Health Organization Statement

14 September 2021

Chairperson, Members of the Committee, ladies and gentlemen.

WHO is pleased to provide an update on initiatives to support and promote the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

For the past seven years, WHO has worked within the framework set out in the WHO Global disability action plan 2014 – 2021: Better health for all people with disability.

Now that the Action Plan has come to its end, Member States adopted a new Resolution on the highest attainable standard of health for persons with disabilities at the 74th World Health Assembly. This landmark Resolution, aligned with the Convention, provides WHO with a mandate to continue its commitment to promote disability inclusion in the health sector.

The Resolution specifically calls Member States to focus on four key areas:

- strengthening their health systems to ensure access to effective health services,
- access to cross-sectorial public health interventions,
- protection during health emergencies, and
- improving collection and disaggregation of reliable data on disability

Health systems need to integrate the needs and requirements of persons with disabilities, so that health services become more inclusive and non-discriminatory for persons with disabilities. This includes for example, addressing physical barriers that prevent access to health services and specific interventions; informational barriers that prevent access to health literacy and information; and attitudinal barriers which give rise to stigma and exclusion.

Cross-sectorial public health interventions that address the many determinants of health including for example social, economic or environmental, need to be designed to reasonably accommodate for the requirements and priorities of persons with disabilities. In this way persons with disabilities can also experience the health gains targeted by the interventions.

COVID-19 demonstrates that health emergencies can happen quickly and catastrophically anywhere in the world, affecting the delivery of health services to all people and particularly those with disability. Therefore, national and international health emergency preparedness and response plans need to include persons with disabilities in every step of their preparation and implementation. Furthermore, we know the success of national responses to COVID-19 depends significantly on health system capacity and the ability to reach vulnerable and at-risk populations, therefore ensuring health services are inclusive and non-discriminatory support inclusion efforts in health emergency responses.

Finally, countries need to improve the collection and disaggregation of coherent, comparable and reliable data on disability to better inform health policies and programmes.

Madame Chair, the Resolution provides a key opportunity to invest efforts and act now towards achieving a disability inclusive health sector that considers the requirements and priorities of persons with disabilities.

We call on the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to take a leadership role and promote the implementation of the Resolution in Member States. Without integrating it in Member State priorities for health system strengthening, the attainment of the highest standard of health for persons with disabilities will only remain an aspiration.

We also call all relevant actors – international organizations, civil society, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, private sector companies, academia, and organizations of persons with disabilities – to model good practice approaches, collaborate and work together to ensure the implementation of the Resolution in Member States. To realise the attainment of the highest standard of health for all persons with disabilities, all relevant actors must support Member States through their active engagement and by holding them to account on international commitments.

We thank the Committee once again for this opportunity. WHO looks forward to continue its work to support and promote the CRPD.