

Letter from the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) on behalf of the Sustainable Health Equity Movement (SHEM) to the Executive Board of the World Health Organization (EB-WHO). 24-29 January 2022

To
His Excellency Dr Patrick Amoth
Chair of the WHO Executive Board

With copies to:

His Excellency Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
WHO Director General

Her Excellency Mrs Carla Moretti
Vice Chair 3 of the WHO Executive Board

The year 2022 begins with a record number of new cases of COVID-19, including in countries with high rates of vaccine coverage. This new wave reminds us that the pandemic remains out of control and that there are no possible accurate predictions about its evolution in the short- or long-term.

More importantly, the current surge in cases demonstrates that even significant scientific and technological advances, especially with the development of vaccines, are still insufficient and the evolution of the pandemic remains largely unpredictable.

It is not just the virus that is winning, but it is also we humans who are losing many battles. We could and should be doing more and better!

From what we have learned in the past two years, there are at least three main areas of action to move forward with: (1) equitable vaccine distribution, (2) consolidation of a global surveillance and response system, anchored in strengthened national health systems, and (3) direct action on the climate crisis and socio-environmental determinants of health, from the perspective of One Health.

Thus, WFPHA and SHEM ask the EB-WHO to bring the following proposals to the WHA:

1) Aligned with the Multilateral Leaders Task Force on COVID-19 Vaccines, Therapeutics and Diagnostics, WHO Member States must implement an equitable distribution of vaccines against COVID-19, which presupposes patent waiving, the sharing of knowledge and the transfer of technology, enabling the expansion of production and distribution based on ethical and epidemiological criteria, at no cost to the end consumer. This must be combined with the WHO's decisive support to vaccine production initiatives amenable for patent pooling and technology transfer contributing to global equity Covid vaccine coverage.

2) The WHA must agree to develop and, on an accelerated timeline, negotiate and adopt a new Pandemic Treaty that, in addition to improving global preparedness and response to health emergencies, helps all countries – especially low- and middle-income – to strengthen their national health systems to

ensure everyone's right to health. The Treaty must also consider the social determinants of health, contemplating intersectoral measures around social, environmental, and economic responses to support health actions.

3) The WHA must recognize that COVID-19 is more than a pandemic and is best characterized as a syndemic. The world suffers from the synergy of COVID-19 and other communicable and non-communicable diseases with political, economic, and environmental macro-processes that jointly cause deep changes that favor the emergence of zoonoses, and which reflect and generate social inequalities and inequities among and within countries. The construction of a “new normal”, better and fairer than the one that brought us here, requires facing all the dimensions of this complex reality, where the global unfair economic order must be faced and the right to development can be achieved by all nations and peoples.

The proposals listed above are based on the understanding that complex problems with multiple determinations require multiple, complex, and transformative measures. In this sense, *'all governments, all societies'* type of responses is necessary to face this COVID-19 syndemic, that is, properly coordinated global responses, involving States and civil societies.

In addition to the WHO and the ministries of health of the different countries, it is paramount that the United Nations, gathering Chief-of-States, in its role as the most important space for international political concertation, also understand and act on the syndemic character of the current crisis.

Hence, the Sustainable Health Equity Movement (SHEM), a civil society organization that brings together 150 institutions in the areas of science, public health, medicine, nursing and other civil society entities from around the world, representing, as a whole, more than 500 institutions and around 20 million professionals and activists, **suggests holding a High-Level Meeting on “Complex-determination and an integral and collaborative response to the COVID-19 syndemic”, on the occasion of the 77th UNGA, in September 2022.**

In this regard, the WFPHA and SHEM request the WHO Executive Board to take to the WHA the above-mentioned proposal to recommend to the President of the UNGA and UN Secretary General the organization of the proposed High-Level Meeting.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Walter Ricciardi
WFPHA President



Prof. Luis Eugenio de Souza
WFPHA Vice-President