

WHO 74th World Health Assembly

Constituency statement on grouped Items 17 (Public health emergencies: preparedness and response) and 18 (Mental health preparedness for and response to the COVID-19 pandemic)

I speak on behalf of FDI World Dental Federation, International Pharmaceutical Federation and World Medical Association.

We are part of a broader coalition of health professionals that represents over 41 million nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, dentists and physicians.

Having a strong health workforce is key to supporting the world through any health emergency. We urge Member States to heed the Independent Panel's urgent call to take immediate action to stop the pandemic and to follow recommendations to ensure that any future infectious disease outbreak does not become another catastrophic pandemic. In particular, countries must invest in preparedness now, and support their health professionals accordingly.

On the COVID-19 response, we ask Member States to:

- Provide channels for health professionals to have timely access to the latest accurate and comprehensive information and guidance on COVID-19, including PPE considerations, and on best practices during the pandemic across countries, free from political interference and manipulation.
- Guarantee continuity of essential health services and avoid diagnosis and treatment backlogs.
- Further invest in infrastructure and update regulations for immunization, to ensure health systems have the capacity for population-wide COVID-19 immunization and that all priority groups (including health professionals) are given precedence in the vaccination rollout in all countries.
- Acknowledge there is a need to separate science and politics and actively involve health professionals in decision-making.

On emergency preparedness, we ask Member States to:

- Support the call for expeditiously negotiating an international legal instrument to address future pandemics.

- Set up a funding mechanism to support developing countries in strengthening their health and education systems for future health emergencies, avoiding disruption of essential health services and supplies.
- Ensure that health facilities provide Positive Practice Environments through sufficient qualified staffing and decent working conditions, including occupational safety, manageable workloads, stress reduction measures, adequate remuneration, protection from violence, abuse and discrimination, and provision of psychosocial support and counselling.
- Include emergency preparedness and response, including guidance on PPE use, in all health professional education curricula and ensure continuing professional development.
- Work with health professionals to foster collaboration between professions to strengthen current care delivery and resilience for the future.

In addition, we urge Member States to prioritize the promotion of mental health and psychosocial well-being in COVID-19 recovery plans, and to place a strong focus on those most vulnerable, including health professionals.