

New World Economic Forum report addresses workforce shortages in the face of economic crises

A new [report](#) published by the World Economic Forum, *Global Health and Healthcare Strategic Outlook*, offers business and policymakers a blueprint for more sustainable, resilient healthcare systems rather than accepting trade-offs of efficiency over social fairness.



Source: iStock

Launched in the run-up to the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2023 in Davos-Klosters, the report presents case studies in four areas that can drive change: equitable access and outcomes; healthcare systems transformation; technology and innovation; and environmental sustainability.

“The pandemic brought remarkable progress for development and delivery of medicines. We now need to focus on long-term system change to stop health services deteriorating in the face of economic crises.

“ ***The shortage of healthcare workers could rise to 10 million by the end of the decade, affecting access to care, inequities and treatment of mental health.*** ”

“Businesses and policy-makers must think beyond false trade-offs of efficiency over social fairness and harness the power of public-private partnerships and outcomes-based regulation to drive healthy equity by the end of the decade,” said Shyam Bishen, head of health and healthcare, World Economic Forum.

The annual meeting will convene more than 2,700 leaders from business, government and civil society. Leaders from healthcare organisations will focus on driving public-private partnerships for better health outcomes.

“ The President of South Africa [@CyrilRamaphosa](#) will join us at [@wef](#) Annual Meeting on 16-20 January in Davos, Switzerland. <https://t.co/pmGTxzEQU5> #wef23 [@GovernmentZA](#) pic.twitter.com/UP2IzfA5EV— World Economic Forum (@wef) [January 10, 2023](#) ”

Pandemic disruptions

The report, prepared with L.E.K Consulting, highlights the pandemic's disruptions such as a 25% drop in coverage of essential health services. This resulted in compound impacts on vulnerable populations and minority communities, especially in low- and middle-income countries.

More specifically, Covid-19 put extra strain on healthcare systems, disrupted global supply chains of essential products and pushed overburdened care providers to breaking point.

"The threat of violence and burnout are real and is one of the contributors as to why doctors are considering other professions," said Kashish Malhotra, physician at the department of internal medicine, at Dayanand Medical College and Hospital, North India.



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To improve access and narrow the global health disparity gap, the report urged healthcare leaders to allocate funds disproportionately towards alternative care models and to include more representative clinical trials across low- to middle-income countries.

As healthcare systems seek to adapt and evolve, innovations frequently outpace regulatory change. On top of this, public regulations vary by jurisdiction and the lack of common standards across the global industry erodes trust, inhibits reimbursements and slows the sector's return to pre-pandemic stability. Meanwhile, the private sector is stymied by fragile and disrupted supply chains, while a go-it-alone business mindset further slows healthcare's systemic transformation.

Public-private partnerships

"Too often we see many companies trying to find the path through the forest themselves and each of them getting lost and not learning from one another," said Jeff Allen, chief executive officer, Friends of Cancer Research. "Public-private partnerships help bridge this divide to find solutions to common problems in a shorter time."

Service delivery value is worth more than volume, the report argues. To incorporate prevention, healthcare policy should be linked to consistent and measurable outcomes since what is efficient is not always what is most effective.



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On partnerships for innovation, the pandemic accelerated a technological tipping point in digital health and telemedicine. This can be expanded to other areas of healthcare. With a Wi-Fi signal and better digital access, a rural patient can consult with a health worker from a nearby city or halfway around the world.

Remote opportunities

"People want on-demand healthcare," said Jisella Veath Dolan, chief global advocacy officer of Honor + Home Instead. "We want greater accessibility to real-time answers."

Remote care empowers both patient and worker. It improves convenience, adherence and access to information across geographies.

By reducing the need for traditional infrastructure, costs per patient fall. And telehealth goes beyond online consultation. Artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics further support clinical decisions, home diagnostics, home-administered drug-delivery systems and patient-monitoring devices.

By harmonising data use, Dolan said, "physicians are building better relationships with patients through telehealth and we are seeing greater uptick in usage by older adults."

"The pandemic demanded emergency responses. However, according to the new report, medical triumphs are too often reactive "cures" to the communicative zoonotic diseases that could have been prevented at far lower costs.

"To preserve health and save lives, a higher return on investment comes from clean air, safe water and healthy biodiversity," he said.

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