



**World Health  
Organization**

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR **Europe**



Annual Business and Technical Conference of the WHO European  
Healthy Cities Network and Network of European National Healthy  
Cities Network

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Overarching Conference theme: **Political choices for Healthy Cities**

Kuopio, Finland, 24-26 June 2015

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### **Provisional scope and purpose**

This is the first Annual Business and Technical Conference of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network and the Network of European National Healthy Cities Networks in Phase VI. The WHO European Network consists of 98 cities. In addition, 30 national healthy cities networks in Europe have more than 1400 cities and towns as members.

The goals and expected outcomes of Phase VI are based on the strategic objectives and priorities for policy action of Health 2020, the European policy framework for health and well-being. Furthermore, the Athens Declaration for Healthy Cities 2014, Strengthening urban leadership for health, health equity and well-being for all, has underlined the leadership role of local governments in taking forward the Health 2020 vision and the need to become more actively engaged in designing and implementing policies and plans for better health and equity for all. In addition, the Conference will address the city perspective to significant European and global developments (such as the Sustainable Development Goals that will be launched by the United Nations this year) in health and development.

The conferences of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network and the Network of European National Healthy Cities Networks are strategic in nature and include a strong political presence from the participating cities and networks. The overarching theme of the conference this year is political choices for Healthy Cities and this theme will be explored through three main thematic strands that reflect the Phase VI themes and priority issues:

1. **city health diplomacy** and **reaching out to other sectors**;
2. **equity, resilience** and **life-course**, with a special focus on the **health of women** and **older people**; and
3. **healthy urban planning** and **urban innovation and technology**, with a special focus on physical activity and active living in general.

A special feature of this conference will be to dedicate significant time for learning and training for different groups of key city actors, to support capacity-building for delivery.

1. **City health diplomacy** and **reaching out to other sectors**. Reaching out to and working with other sectors is critical in developing intersectoral action frameworks that invest in health and healthy cities at the local level. Cross-party political dialogue, building capacity for effective leadership as well as creating local platforms and mechanisms to engage important sectors such as the **education** and the **social sectors** supports action to address health equity, health literacy, well-being and sustainable development. **Tourism** is an important sector for the economic, social and cultural development of cities. The Conference will provide a platform to conceptualise healthy tourism and discuss good practices. Further,

cities today in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world can be important actors in advocating, promoting and supporting **global health and development**. City health diplomacy will be a central topic of the Conference this year. The focus will be on understanding the relevance, importance and power of city (health) diplomacy, on deploying city health diplomacy and taking the concept into practice. In this context, participants will also be briefed about the global Sustainable Development Goals process, which will conclude in 2015 (the Sustainable Development Goals are a new, universal set of goals, targets and indicators that United Nations Member States will be expected to use to frame their agendas and political policies over the next 15 years) and the preparations for two important global events in 2016: Habitat III (the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to take place in Quito, Ecuador in October 2016) and the 9th Global Health Promotion Conference (to be held in Shanghai on 21–25 November 2016), which will devote significant space to healthy cities.

2. **Equity, community resilience and life-course approaches:** addressing **health inequalities** and **building community resilience** remain a constant in all Healthy Cities work. Health 2020 and the recommendations of the European review of social determinants of health and the health divide provide strong legitimacy and an evidence base for action. This year the Conference will especially focus on women. 2015 is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (Beijing +20). The WHO Regional Committee for Europe will receive a report in September 2015 to illustrate how socioeconomic determinants and gender affect the **opportunities of girls and women** in the WHO European Region. Much has been done to address women's health needs and how women contribute to the health of society. However, many areas still need urgent attention: how the environment affects women and the role of women as actors of change, the participation of women in public life and politics, economic empowerment of women and how this affects their health, sexual and reproductive rights, multiple discrimination of women from ethnic minorities and women with disabilities, the role of women in informal care, etc. Priority still has to be given to preventing violence against women as a violation of women's rights and a result of prevailing gender inequality. Empowering women is part of the human rights-based approach to health embedded in Health 2020. Cities will pay special attention to applying new strategies to empower women and promote interventions to tackle health inequities. All these are critical areas in which city policies and services can have a strong impact.
3. In addition, the Conference will address **healthy ageing** as also one of the main constants and increasingly relevant areas of action for Healthy Cities. Healthy ageing is a cross-cutting topic that has strong links to other topics of the Conference, such as urban planning, innovation and technology, gender issues and health literacy. The Conference will consider how to maximize synergy. **Health literacy** will be discussed as another cross-cutting issue for intersectoral action and relevant throughout the life stages and to both sexes. The Conference will also provide opportunities to explore further the actions aimed at promoting **happiness** and resilient communities.
4. **Healthy urban planning and urban innovation and technology.** Healthy urban planning and design represent one of the most successful, innovative and immensely relevant areas of healthy city action. Many cities have shown significant progress in this respect, including the host city, Kuopio. The Conference will look at examples of good practices with special attention on political choices that make the difference in creating healthy built environments. Social and physical environments can be designed to integrate safe and active living (physically and socially) easily into people's daily lives, reducing the risk of most chronic noncommunicable diseases and contributing significantly to improved health outcomes, including mental health and overall well-being. Urban planning and integrated transport systems to promote walking and cycling are essential elements of integrated strategies to increase physical activity. The WHO Regional Committee for Europe will consider this year a physical activity strategy for 2016–2025 in which local governments will have a critical role. Planning for efforts to integrate immigrant populations and provide equitable access to municipal resources and opportunities can be strengthened through intersectoral actions. Urban innovation and technology enhance integration and create leadership for new approaches to improve health outcomes.

The Conference objectives are:

- to debate and explore the challenges of making local political choices for health;

- to demonstrate the importance of intersectoral action for improving health and well-being at the local and urban levels, especially in relation to equity, vulnerability and creating supportive environments for health;
- to learn from innovative and good practices of healthy cities and national networks; and
- to build capacity to support key city actors in delivering actions for improved health outcomes and to consider supporting substructures for Phase VI delivery.

This year, the Healthy Cities evaluation team will offer training on action research and learning and on developing evaluation mindsets in everyday practices. In addition, it will organize group or individualized workshops and mentoring on preparing and publishing case studies based on good practices.

In addition, the Conference will provide a series of interactive innovative training sessions using a variety of formats to support learning and skills development to support delivery based on the Phase VI framework.

Individual sessions will be held **for politicians** on the topics of political choices for healthy cities and city health diplomacy. The programme includes coordinators' meetings, individual meetings with cities and site visits in the second part of the afternoon on the second day of the Conference.

### **Expected participants**

The conferences of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network and the Network of European National Healthy Cities Networks are mainly political and strategic and always include a strong political presence from the participating cities and networks. The expected participants will be:

- delegations from the cities participating in the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, which will include the mayor or lead politician, the city coordinator and selected focal points identified to work on the Conference and Phase VI core themes;
- delegations from national healthy cities networks, which will include the political chair of the network, the coordinator, a representative of the health ministry and the regions and one or two observers from member cities;
- invited dignitaries, keynote speakers, resource experts and advisers; and
- representatives from European Region countries currently not involved in the Healthy Cities movement.