

Too many people still without access to basic health care, 40 years after the Alma Ata Declaration

International experts in Antwerp to take stock of progress on primary health care ahead of large WHO-UNICEF gathering in Astana

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Dit is de omschrijving

In 1978, the Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care (PHC) identified the access to basic health care as the cornerstone to achieve health for all. Forty years later international health experts return to what is now Kazakhstan for the WHO-UNICEF [“Global Conference on Primary Health Care”](#) in Astana. Ahead of the jamboree, around 150 international experts gather at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp (ITM) for a symposium to take stock on progress and to reflect on the Declaration’s relevance and feasibility in a rapidly changing world.

“The Alma Ata Declaration was the culmination of a growing international awareness on the problematic functioning of health systems. It also denounced the widening health inequities within and among countries as morally, socially and politically unacceptable,” said Prof Bart Criel and Dr Valeria Campos da Silveira, scientific coordinators of the symposium. “Today, a large part of the global population still lacks access to essential health services, despite considerable efforts since the engagements made in Alma Ata,” added Prof Criel, who will be part of the Belgian delegation attending the Astana conference. “This is a moment to reflect, together with younger generations of health professionals from all over the globe, on how we can do better and implement health policies that aim for ‘Health for All.’” According to a [2017 report by the World Bank and WHO](#), half the world lacks access to essential health services, and 100 million are still pushed into extreme poverty due to health expenses.

The aim of the preparatory event in Antwerp is to bring the renewed declaration on primary health care of the World Health Organization to the attention of Belgian policy makers and to critically analyse it in the face of the vast changes that have taken place globally since 1978. The event brings together a varied audience of academia, public health students, health professionals, civil society representatives, aid organisations and public health policy makers - from both the South and the North. The Symposium will be followed later in the year by a conference jointly organised by the Belgian federal authorities of Public Health and Development Cooperation.

Ethiopia – case study on investment in primary health care

Scientific journal The Lancet published a special edition last week to mark the Alma Ata anniversary, featuring a [paper of ITM alumnus Yibeltal Assefa and ITM professor Wim Van Damme](#) on the primary health care system in Ethiopia.

“Weaknesses in the primary health care system have hindered the achievements of programmes to control AIDS, TB, malaria and vaccine-preventable diseases in many countries with weak health systems. Since 2005, Ethiopia has successfully embraced a diagonal investment approach to strengthen essential health services and scale up disease control programmes, by using funding from global health initiatives, such as the Global Fund, PEPFAR & GAVI, to strengthen the overall health system,” said Prof Wim Van Damme. “As a result, the coverage of individual programme and overall health status have increased.”

