

# WHAT IS GLOBAL HEALTH?

- ♣ An area for study, research, and practice that places a priority on improving health and achieving equity in health for all people worldwide.
- ♣ Global health emphasizes transnational health issues, determinants, and solutions; involves many disciplines within and beyond health sciences and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration; and is a synthesis of population-based prevention with individual-level clinical care.
- Global health is collaborative trans-national research and action for promoting health for all.

## KEY ASPECTS OF THE DEFINITION GLOBAL HEALTH

The term global health is used rather than global public health to avoid the perception that our endeavors are focused only on classical, and nationally based, public health actions. Global health builds on national public health efforts and institutions. In many countries public health is equated primarily with population-wide interventions; global health is concerned with all strategies for health improvement, whether population-wide or individually based health care actions, and across all sectors, not just the health sector.

Collaborative (or collective) emphasizes the critical importance of collaboration in addressing all health issues and especially global issues which have a multiplicity of determinants and a complex array of institutions involved in finding solutions.

Trans-national (or cross-national) refers to the concern of global health with issues that transcend national boundaries even though the effects of global health issues are experienced within countries. Trans-national action requires the involvement of more than two countries, with at least one outside the traditional regional groupings, without which it would be considered a localized or regional issue. At the same time, trans-national work is usually based on strong national public health institutions.

Research implies the importance of developing the evidence-base for policy based on a full range of disciplines and especially research which highlights the effects of trans-national determinants of health.

Action emphasizes the importance of using this evidence-based information constructively in all countries to improve health and health equity.

Promoting (or improving) implies the importance of using a full range of public health and health promotion strategies to improve health, including those directed at the underlying social, economic, environmental and political determinants of health.

Health for all positions global health at the forefront of the resurgence of interest in multi-sectoral approaches to health improvement and the need to strengthen primary health care as the basis of all health systems.

## **UNDERSTANDING THE WORD “GLOBAL”**

- ♣ Confusion in understanding the term ‘global health’ has largely resulted from our understanding of the word “global”.
- ♣ There are few discrepancies when the word ‘global’ is used in other settings such as in geography. In there, the world global physically pertains to the Earth we live on, including all people and all countries in the world. However, discrepancies appear when the word “global” is combined with the word “health” to form the term “global health”. Following the word “global” literally, an institution, a research project, or an article can be considered as global only if it encompasses all people and all countries in the world x.
- ♣ If we follow this understanding, few of the work we are doing now belong to global health; even the work by WHO are for member countries only, not for all people and all countries in the world x. But most studies published in various global health journals are conducted at a local or international level.
- ♣ So How could this global health happen?

The aforementioned argument lead to another conceptualization: Global health means health for a very large group of people in a very large geographic area such as the Western Pacific, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Along with this line of understanding, an institution, a research project or an article involving multi-countries and places can be considered as global v.

They are considered as global because they meet definitions of global health which focus on medical and health issues with global impact or look for global solutions to a medical or health issue v.

## **THINK GLOBALLY AND ACT LOCALLY**

- ♣ Thinking globally and acting locally means to learn from each other in understanding and solving local health problems with the broadest perspective possible.
  - ♣ Thinking globally and acting locally means adopting solutions that haven been proven effective in other comparable settings. It may greatly increase the efficiency to solve many global health issues if we approach these issues with a globally focused perspective.
  - ♣ Thinking globally and acting locally means learning from each other at different levels. At the individual level, people in high income countries can learn from those in lowand mid-income countries to be physically more active; while people in LMICs can learn from those in high income countries to improve their life styles, personal health management, etc.
- At the population level, communities, organizations, governments, and countries can learn from each other in understanding their own medical and health problems and healthcare systems, and to seek solutions for these problems.
- ♣ Thinking globally and acting locally means opportunities to conduct global health research and to be able to exchange research findings and experiences across the globe; even without traveling to another country.

# REFRAMING A LOCAL RESEARCH STUDY AS GLOBAL

♣ A research project is global if it involves multiple countries with investigators of diverse backgrounds from different countries. However, if a research project targets a local population with investigators from only one or two local institutions, **can** such project be considered as global?

**“Yes”, if the researcher:**

- (1) can demonstrate that the issue to be studied or being studied has a global impact
- (2) eventually looks for a global solution although supported with local data.

## THE EMERGENCE OF “GLOBAL HEALTH”

- Our current understanding of the concept of global health is based on information in the literature in the past seven to eight decades. Global health as a scientific term first appeared in the literature in the 1940s.
- It was subsequently used by the World Health Organization (WHO) as guidance and theoretical foundation.
- Few scholars discussed the concept of global health until the 1990s, and the number of papers on this topic has risen rapidly in the subsequent decade when global health was promoted under the Global Health Initiative - a global health plan signed by the U.S. President Barack Obama.
- As a key part of the national strategy in economic globalization, security and international policies, global health in the United States has promoted collaborations across countries to deal with challenging medical and health issues through federal funding, development aids, capacity building, education, scientific research, policymaking and implementation.

## Exhibit I-2 The History of Global Health: A Summary

**400 BC:** Hippocrates presents the causal relationship between environment and disease.

**First century AD:** Romans introduce public sanitation and organize a water supply system.

**Fourteenth century:** The “Black Death” (bubonic plague) leads to quarantine and *cordon sanitaire*.

**Middle Ages:** Colonial expansion spreads infectious diseases around the world.

**1750–1850:** The Industrial Revolution results in extensive health and social improvements in cities in Europe and the United States.

**1850–1910:** Knowledge about the causes and transmission of communicable diseases is greatly expanded.

**1910–1945:** Reductions in child mortality occur. Schools of public health and international foundations and intergovernmental agencies interested in public health are established.

**1945–1990:** The World Bank and other UN agencies are created. WHO eradicates smallpox. The HIV/AIDS pandemic begins. The Alma Ata Conference gives emphasis to primary health care. UNICEF leads efforts to ensure universal childhood immunization. Greater attention is given to chronic diseases.

**1990–2000:** Priority is given to health-sector reform, the impact of and responses to globalization, cost-effectiveness, and public-private partnerships in health.

**2000–2010:** Priority is given to equity, social determinants of health, health and development, use of innovative information and communications technologies, achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and response to influenza.

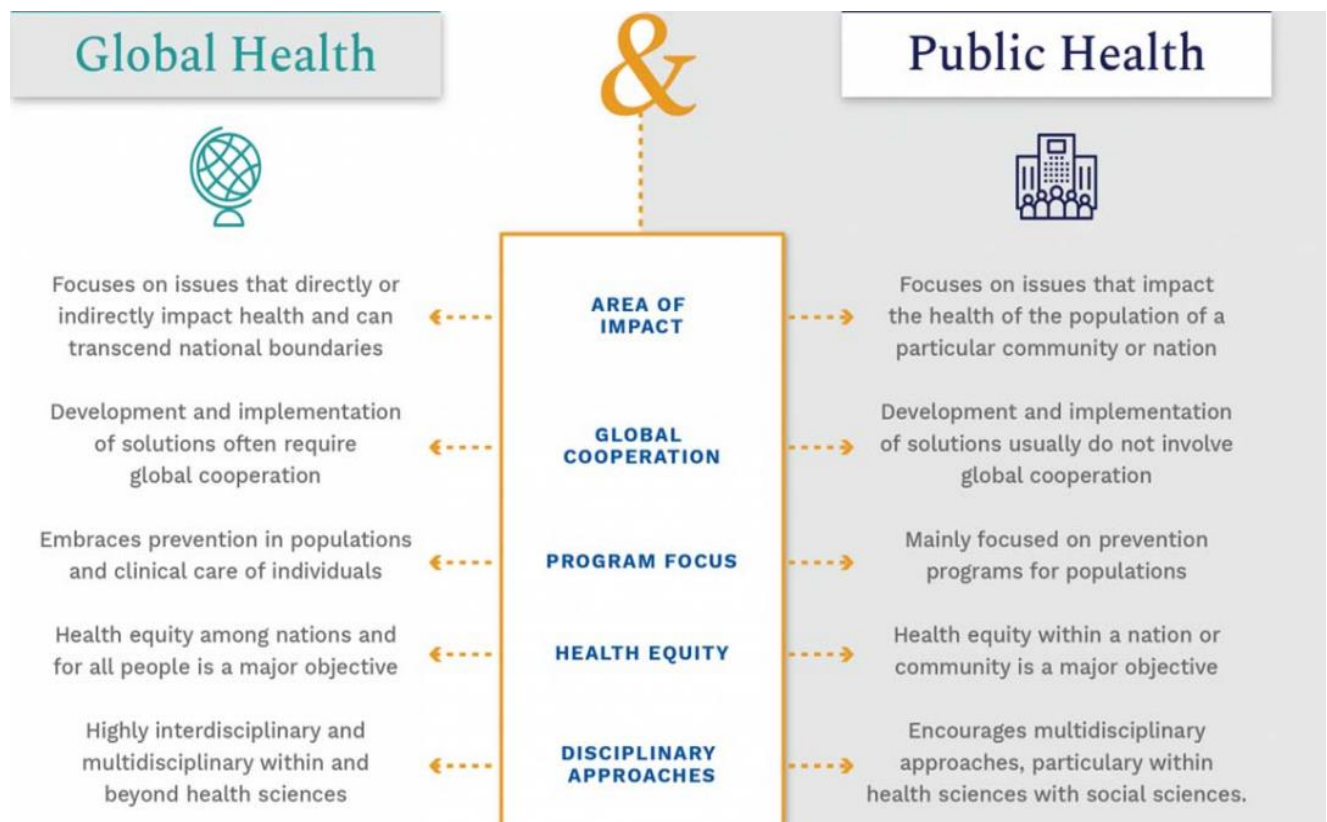
Global Health: Diseases, Program, Systems, and Policies. Michael H. Merson, Robert E. Black, Anne J. Mills. Fourth Edition (2020).

# PUBLIC HEALTH, INTERNATIONAL HEALTH, & GLOBAL HEALTH

- **Public Health:** Developed as a discipline in the mid 19th century in UK, Europe and US. Concerned more with national issues.
  - Data and evidence to support action, focus on populations, social justice and equity, emphasis on preventions vs cure.
- **International Health:** Developed during past decades, came to be more concerned with:
  - the diseases (e.g. tropical diseases)
  - conditions (war, natural disasters) of middle- and low-income countries.
  - Tended to denote a one-way flow of ‘good ideas’.
- **Global Health:** More recent in its origin and emphasizes a greater scope of health problems and solutions.
  - that transcend national boundaries
  - requiring greater inter-disciplinary approach

## The contrast and similarities among the “global health,” “international health,” and “public health” domains

	Global Health	International Health	Public Health
Geographical reach	Focuses on issues that directly or indirectly affect health but that can transcend national boundaries	Focuses on health issues of countries other than one’s own, especially those of low income and middle income	Focuses on issues that affect the health of the population of a particular community or country
Level of cooperation	Development and implementation of solutions often require global cooperation	Development and implementation of solutions usually require binational cooperation	Development and implementation of solutions do not usually require global cooperation
Individuals or populations	Embraces both prevention in populations and clinical care of individuals	Embraces both prevention in populations and clinical care of individuals	Mainly focuses on prevention programs for populations
Access to health	Health equity among nations and for all people is a major objective	Seeks to help people of other nations	Health equity within a nation or community is a major objective
Range of disciplines	Highly interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary within and beyond health sciences	Embraces a few disciplines but has not emphasized multidisciplinary	Encourages multidisciplinary approaches, particularly within health sciences and with social sciences



## WHY GLOBAL HEALTH?

Global health serves three basic functions:

1. The first function is to generate new knowledge and theories about global health issues, influential factors, and develop global solutions.
2. The second function is to distribute the knowledge through education, training, publication and other forms of knowledge sharing.

**3.** The last function is to apply the global health knowledge, theories, and intervention strategies in practice to solve global health problems.

- ♣ National borders do not stop the spread of disease. As such, addressing global health issues and working to prevent outbreaks directly impacts the health and well-being of everyone.

- ♣ Investing in the health care needs of individuals reduces the cost of future pandemics, long-term disability and premature death, and improves the ability of individuals in developing countries to contribute to their own economies.

- ♣ A healthy community leads to a healthy workforce that misses fewer days of work and can continually provide for their families.

- ♣ Investing in global health allows developing nations to move toward aid independence and increase their participation in the global economy.

- ♣ Progress in global health and development has challenged the traditional thinking in foreign assistance. In the last century, and even today, it has been quite common to divide the world into “North” and “South” when referring to “developed” and “developing” countries. This nomenclature ignores major economic, demographic, and social changes of the last decades.

- ♣ In the past, there were two clear categories of rich and poor; today, some poor countries (mostly in Africa) have become poorer, while the majority of rich countries have become richer. However, several countries have since sharply improved their economic situation and acquired the label of “emerging economies,” rendering the earlier terms less relevant.

# KEY CONCEPTS IN RELATION TO GLOBAL HEALTH

## Inequalities vs. Inequities

**Health Inequalities** - "the uneven distribution of health in or between populations." This can include differences like older adults tend to require more medications than younger adults, or the health needs of women are different than men, due to pregnancy.

**Health Inequities** - "the presence of systematic disparities in health between more and less advantaged social groups." For example, populations in poor countries tend to have higher rates of childhood mortality than populations in wealthy countries.

## GLOBAL HEALTH SOLUTION

♣ Different from the conventional understanding in public health and medicine, global health selectively targets issues with global impact. Such issues often can only be effectively solved at the macro level through cross-cultural, international, and/or even global collaboration and cooperation among different entities and stakeholders. Furthermore, as long as the problem is solved, it will benefit a large number of population. This type of intervention is framed as a global solution.

## GLOBAL HEALTH COVERAGE

- ♣ Social sciences
- ♣ Behavioural sciences
- ♣ Law
- ♣ Economics
- ♣ History
- ♣ Engineering
- ♣ Biomedical sciences
- ♣ Environmental sciences