

WHO European Healthy Cities Network  
Online Annual Healthy Cities Business and Technical Conference  
**Healthy cities in times of pandemic: protecting communities and  
building back better**  
Web-based event, 8-10 December 2020

29 October 2020

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### **Provisional scope and purpose**

Cities have found themselves as national and international epicentres of the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been challenged in unprecedented ways to continue to meet the needs of their communities – including the most vulnerable – while maintaining public health measures, reorienting and redesigning services and spaces and adapting to the changing economic, social and cultural challenges brought about by the crisis.

The WHO European Healthy Cities Network was launched in 1988 as a political, cross-cutting and intersectoral initiative to be implemented through direct collaboration with cities. It is now a principal political and strategic vehicle for promoting whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches within the WHO European Region.

The challenges that preceded the pandemic have been brought sharply to the forefront of the health emergency. This includes the climate emergency, the global burden of noncommunicable diseases, the lack of preparedness to respond to communicable diseases, the unfair and unjust inequalities scarring cities and countries and too often continued disinvestment in critical public health capacity and resources.

As countries and cities adjust to the new normal and start to invest in recovery efforts, it is critical that business as usual not be the default. Strengthening urban health to address the public health challenges requires meaningful deliberation and integrating the concepts of promoting inclusiveness, improving health equity and creating conditions for sustainable, safe and resilient communities. These endeavours are required not only to respond to COVID-19 and the challenges it brings but also to address the root causes of common global challenges and enable cities to build back better.

Health and well-being for all is a central focus of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These are more critical now than ever. Without health, the common goals and urgent needs will not be reached: at the same time, health benefits from progress toward the underlying environmental and social determinants addressed by other Sustainable Development Goals. Local governments have the authority and the capability to create conditions to promote inclusive economies of well-being, spatial design and planning that works for people and healthy living and high quality of life for everyone who lives, works and visits their cities. Strategic decisions made in sectors such as economic development, housing, transport, energy, land-use planning, urban agriculture, food services and waste management all significantly affect the health of urban populations, as do policies related to education and human services.

This will be the first Annual Business Meeting and Conference to be held in Phase VII of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network. The WHO European Network comprises almost 100 flagship WHO healthy cities. In addition, 30 national healthy cities networks in Europe have more than 1500 cities and municipalities as members.

The Conference will review the actions undertaken by cities to respond to COVID-19 and explore the actions to build back better, in the context of Phase VII as well as national and international commitments.

The themes of the Conference will be:

- 1) Peace and Participation
  - a. Urban preparedness for disasters and emergencies
  - b. Community resilience and mobilization
- 2) People and Place
  - a. Supporting and promoting mental health and well-being
  - b. Supportive and inclusive places for the new normal
- 3) Planet and Prosperity
  - a. Building back better through an economy of well-being
  - b. City leadership for a green and healthy recovery

This will be the first virtual delivery of a healthy cities conference, and the intention is to ensure that this is as inclusive as possible.

The Conference objectives are:

- to create the opportunity for dialogue to strengthen leadership and governance in COVID-19 response and recovery measures;
- to debate and explore how COVID-19 is affecting the implementation of Phase VII; and
- to demonstrate and learn from the practices of healthy cities and national networks and the important contribution of healthy cities to protecting, promoting and improving health and well-being at the local and urban levels, especially in relation to inclusiveness; sustainable development and resilience.

The expected participants will be:

- delegations from the city or municipality members of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network, which will include the mayor or lead politician, the coordinator and other observer colleagues welcome to attend the virtual sessions;
- 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 observers from member cities;
- invited dignitaries, keynote speakers, resource experts and advisers; and
- representatives from WHO, United Nations agencies and international organizations in partnership with the WHO European Healthy Cities Network;
- representatives from city networks in partnership with the European Healthy Cities Network; and
- representatives from countries from outside the European Region.