

## Key Messages

### Overarching message

#### *Health systems need to be resilient and responsive in a turbulent and changing world*

Health systems across the world are facing shocks and stresses brought about by infectious disease outbreaks and hidden epidemics like mental illness and malnutrition, and also by ecological, demographic, economic and political challenges. To withstand these global challenges and mitigate the effects of emerging and future crises we need to build strong and resilient health systems.

Many non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and lung disease are preventable yet claim health and lives prematurely. The global burden of these diseases are expected to increase by 17% by 2025 (NCD Alliance, 2014). Health systems need to go beyond providing health care to sick people, to improving their health and preventing illness. This will require political will to implement changes by placing people's needs at the centre and supporting collaborative research, to generate the evidence necessary to inform policy and practice.

### Symposium themes of resilience and responsiveness:

#### *Recent health crises provide key lessons for all*

Urgent lessons must be learnt from the challenges magnified by the likes of the Zika and Ebola epidemics, the exploding problems of obesity and undernutrition, and the health implications of the global economic recession and climate change, to be able to withstand current and future crises. Investment in strengthening public institutions is needed, as well as building people's trust in these, and then delivering services effectively. A greater emphasis on improving public health is necessary, as well as resourcing the provision of healthcare.

In Liberia, there were fewer than 100 doctors and about 1,400 nurses and midwives at the time of the Ebola outbreak, for a population of more than 4 million (Human Resource Census, 2009). It was only through the combination of rapidly mobilising a larger health workforce, including professionals from outside the affected region as well as lesser-trained practitioners and community health workers, and concerted efforts to regain the trust of communities, that the epidemic was eventually effectively tackled.

#### *People need to be at the centre of health systems*

To respond to the changing landscape, decision makers must understand people's needs and recognise the social, economic and ecological causes of ill health, such as climate change and the global recession. Longer lifespans and the growing burden of long-term chronic conditions such as diabetes and obesity require complex interventions and are putting increasing pressure on health systems globally (WHO, 2016).

*While we have the medicines and technologies to save lives, access and availability are often hindered as a result of weak national health infrastructures and financing systems, poor management of supply chains, fragmentation between the public and private sectors, and lack of translation of international guidelines at national levels.* If the global community is able to respond to these challenges they have to put people's needs at the centre of design and delivery of healthcare.

## Key information

### *What is a health system?*

A health system is the people, institutions and resources, arranged together in accordance with established policies, to improve the health of a population.

*What does a resilient health system look like?*

A resilient health system is one that is able to prepare and respond to health-related crises by maintaining core functions and reorganizing if required.

*What is a responsive health system?*

A responsive health system meets a population's needs and expectations of how it should be treated, including respecting people's dignity, autonomy and confidentiality; and anticipates and corresponds with people's changing needs, which are shaped by social, economic, ecological and epidemiological changes.

*What is HSR2016?*

[Health Systems Global](#) organizes a symposium every two years to bring together its members with the broad range of players involved in health systems and policy research. The focus of the Fourth Global Symposium on Health Systems Research (HSR2016) in Vancouver between 16-18 November is on building resilient and responsive health systems.

It will host over 2,000 leading global health thinkers and practitioners on health systems. Since the last Symposium in 2014, the world has faced the likes of Ebola and the Zika Virus, making all too real the realities of weak health systems. This symposium will ask the urgent questions of how our health systems can absorb such shocks, respond to needs and take advantage of new opportunities.