

Human health rights: A fundamental pillar of global well-being

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INTRODUCTION

Human health rights are a cornerstone of global well-being and social justice. These rights, enshrined in various international agreements and declarations, recognize the inherent dignity of every individual and emphasize the need for equitable access to healthcare services and a healthy living environment. In this comprehensive discussion, we will explore the concept of human health rights, their historical development, their importance in the context of contemporary global challenges and the potential paths to ensuring their realization.

DESCRIPTION

Historical development of human health rights

The concept of human health rights has evolved over centuries, shaped by various historical, political and social factors. Some key milestones in this development include:

The enlightenment and declaration of independence: The Enlightenment period of the 18th century ushered in a new era of individual rights and freedoms. Philosophers like John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau emphasized the rights to life, liberty and property. These ideas influenced the drafting of the United States declaration of Independence in 1776, which affirmed the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness as inalienable rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR): After the devastation of World War II, the United Nations adopted the UDHR in 1948. This landmark document recognized the right to healthcare as part of the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being. Article 25 of the UDHR states that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family."

Alma-Ata declaration: In 1978, the World Health Organization and UNICEF jointly adopted the Alma-Ata declaration, which highlighted the importance of primary healthcare as a means to achieving the highest possible level of health. This declaration emphasized the need for accessible and affordable healthcare for all.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR): The ICESCR, adopted in 1966, further solidified the right to health. Article 12 of the ICESCR

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recognizes "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The MDGs, established in 2000 and their successor, the SDGs, which came into effect in 2015, include specific targets related to healthcare, such as reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS. These goals underscore the global commitment to health as a fundamental right.

Importance of human health rights

Ensuring dignity and equality: Human health rights recognize that every individual has inherent dignity and worth. These rights promote equality in access to healthcare, regardless of one's socio-economic status, race, gender, or any other characteristic.

Preventing discrimination: Human health rights protect individuals from discrimination based on health status, ensuring that everyone has the same opportunities to lead a healthy life.

Promoting public health: Recognizing health as a fundamental right encourages governments and international organizations to invest in public health infrastructure, disease prevention and health promotion.

Advancing economic development: Healthy populations are more productive and can contribute to economic development. Human health rights, by ensuring access to healthcare, indirectly support economic growth.

Challenges to realizing human health rights

While the concept of human health rights is widely acknowledged and endorsed, significant challenges persist in achieving their full realization. Some of the main obstacles include:

Health inequalities: Health inequalities persist within and between countries, driven by socio-economic disparities, inadequate healthcare infrastructure and limited access to essential services.

Healthcare financing: Many countries struggle to finance healthcare systems adequately, leading to underfunded and inefficient services. Universal healthcare coverage remains a goal for many nations.

Healthcare workforce shortages: A shortage of skilled

healthcare professionals is a global issue, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. This scarcity impedes the delivery of quality healthcare services.

Access to medicines: The high cost of essential medicines and treatments can prevent individuals from accessing the care they need. Intellectual property rights and pharmaceutical industry practices often contribute to this problem.

Global health threats: The emergence of global health threats, such as pandemics, climate change-related health issues and antimicrobial resistance, poses new challenges to human health rights.

Strengthening healthcare systems: Governments can invest in building robust healthcare systems that provide comprehensive services to all citizens, irrespective of their socio-economic status. This includes increasing the number of healthcare facilities, improving infrastructure and enhancing the quality of care.

Universal health coverage: Implementing universal health coverage can ensure that all individuals have access to essential healthcare services without financial hardship. This approach has been endorsed by the World Health Organization as a key means to achieve health for all.

Addressing health inequalities: Policymakers should address social determinants of health, such as income inequality, education and housing, to reduce health disparities. Targeted interventions in disadvantaged communities can help bridge the health gap.

CONCLUSION

Human health rights are a fundamental pillar of global well-being, rooted in the principles of dignity, equality and access to healthcare for all. While substantial progress has been made in recognizing and upholding these rights, challenges such as health inequalities, healthcare financing and global health threats persist. To fully realize human health rights, governments, organizations and individuals must work together to strengthen healthcare systems, promote universal health coverage and address the underlying social determinants of health. By doing so, we can create a world where every individual can enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, fulfilling the promise of human health rights for all.