

Governments and health leaders call for action on adolescent wellbeing

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Governments and health leaders across the globe are today calling for urgent action on adolescent wellbeing.

In an [open letter](#) published by *The BMJ*, they warn that the current generation of adolescents—1.2 billion people aged 10-19 worldwide—“are at risk of inheriting a world blighted by climate change and scarred by covid-19.”

The 30 signatories include the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health, the World Health Organization, United Nations and its related agencies, youth led organisations, civil society, foundations, academia, and government representatives in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Europe.

Although adolescents have been spared the most severe direct effects of the pandemic, the indirect effects on their wellbeing are devastating, they argue.

They explain that, even before covid-19, adolescents and young adults faced many

challenges to their wellbeing, including [social injustice](#) and inequalities, inadequate mental health, and a crisis of connection to family, community and society, with increasing numbers living on the streets or dropping out of school.

Yet between 2003 and 2015, development assistance for [adolescent](#) health accounted for only 1.6% of total development assistance for health, despite a third of the total global burden of disease estimated to have roots in adolescence.

When adolescents move into young adulthood, many face unemployment or unstable employment, they add. In 2017, 34% of [young women](#) and 10% of young men aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education or training, with more pronounced disparities in northern Africa and southern Asia.

And even among employed adolescents and [young adults](#), an increasing proportion have poor job security, variable weekly earnings, and minimal or no health or social security coverage.

“These examples show that, as a global community, we have paid insufficient attention to the multidimensional and intersectional nature of adolescent wellbeing and the importance of the transition to young adulthood,” they write.

As a result, they have committed to a call to action for adolescent wellbeing to ensure that today's adolescents are empowered to solve the problems they are inheriting.

Underpinning this is a new agreed definition and conceptual framework for adolescent wellbeing to inform policies and programming.

This framework includes good health and optimum nutrition; connectedness, positive values, and contribution to society; safety and a supportive environment; learning, competence, education,

skills, and employability; and agency and resilience.

"We invite everyone—[decision makers](#), policy makers, [civil society](#), service providers, educators, donors, innovators, and, most importantly, adolescents themselves—to support this call to action," they write.

"Together, we can ensure that it results in concrete policies, integrated programmes, and sustained investments for adolescent wellbeing."

They stress that adolescents, youth and youth led organisations "are at the heart of this initiative and will continue to be so." But they say "we all have a part to play in achieving these goals if we are to deliver a more equitable and inclusive world for this and future generations."

More information: Uniting for adolescents in covid-19 and beyond, *BMJ* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.n719](#)

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