



Better health for greater wealth

- **WHO puts health systems top of the agenda at European Health Forum Gastein**
- **Positive economic impact of improved health conditions**
- **Ministerial Conference on Health Systems to be held in Tallinn next year**

European Health Forum Gastein, 2007, Austria. The positive impact of better health on the economic status and development of nations is a widely neglected fact. It is commonly understood that economic and social development improves health status. What is less widely acknowledged is that health status also contributes to economic development and wealth at both the domestic and national levels. To raise awareness for the key role of effective public health systems for economic success was one of the core issues at the WHO-sponsored workshop “Performing health systems: contributing to health, economic growth and social welfare” held in the scope of the European Health Forum Gastein, the EU’s most important congress on health politics.

If health could be improved, a whole range of economic benefits would result. In eastern Europe and central Asia, for example, evidence suggests that if a country’s adult mortality was reduced by as little as 2% annually over 25 years, the economic gain would account for 25–40% of the country’s current total income.

The Regional Office for Europe of the World Health Organization (WHO) is undertaking a comprehensive analysis of the contribution that well-functioning health systems make to health, wealth and economic growth. The WHO European Ministerial Conference on Health Systems: “Health Systems, Health and Wealth”, to be held in Tallinn, Estonia on 25–27 June 2008, will be a milestone in this process.

A European Charter on health systems is also being developed. On 6 October 2007, a drafting group of senior decision-makers will meet for the first time, in Gastein, to develop a draft of the Charter for further discussion. The objective of the Charter is to provide guidance and a strategic framework for strengthening health systems throughout the Region. The draft Charter will be submitted to the Ministerial Conference in Tallinn for adoption by the 53 Member States of the WHO European Region.

The WHO European Ministerial Conference on Health Systems: “Health Systems, Health and Wealth”

The Conference will take place in Tallinn, Estonia on 25–27 June 2008, hosted by the Government of Estonia. It is part of the Regional Office’s continuing commitment to supporting Member States in strengthening their health systems and is being organized in response to resolution EUR/RC55/R8, adopted by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its fifty-fifth session in 2005.

The Conference aims to place health systems high on the political agenda. Specifically, it will:

- lead to a better understanding of the impact of health systems on people's health and therefore on economic growth in the WHO European Region; and
- take stock of recent evidence on effective strategies to improve the performance of health systems, given the increasing pressures on them to ensure sustainability and solidarity.

The Conference will bring together ministers of health from the 53 Member States of the WHO European Region. Up to 500 participants are expected to attend the 2½-day event. High-level delegations will be invited, as well as health systems partners, experts, observers and representatives of international and civil society organizations and the mass media. Particular emphasis will be placed on engaging ministries of finance through the ministries of health.

Further information is available at: <http://www.euro.who.int/healthsystems2008>.

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