

# Global Health: Progress and Challenges

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As decades have passed, the global effort for revolutionizing health and disease has progressed exponentially. The average global life expectancy has increased by seven years, and the rate of individuals dying from multitudes of diseases is decreasing. More citizens in sub-Saharan Africa have access to treatment for HIV/AIDS, and the death rate has been halved. Polio, malaria and countless vaccine-preventable disease cases are also being reduced at substantial rates. Health on an international level is continuously advancing as the battle against disease rages on.

The progress made toward bettering global health can be attributed to several factors. First, economic prosperity can directly impact health improvements through more funding going toward services that affect an individual's health (e.g., sanitary living conditions, water and food). The correlation between wealth and health does not account for the prosperity of health research entirely, though; there are many countries that fit the exceptions to this theory. Second, the progress in health can be traced to more education about health and disease, technology development, an increase in interventions to discover the source of illnesses, and support from both a political and social standpoint to enforce such found solutions globally. Third, the assistance from other nations, private philanthropic organizations and governments alike have contributed to the efforts to ameliorate global health issues. Many refer to such progress in health and disease as the "golden age."

Despite all of the progress being made, substantial amounts of improvement still need to be made. The numbers of deaths for preventable and curable diseases are statistically dropping; however, such illnesses are still taking high numbers of lives. Additionally, the amount of noncommunicable diseases continue to rise, such as heart diseases and cancers. The leading cause of death in all regions, excluding sub-Saharan Africa, is cardiovascular disease, a noncommunicable disease. While infant mortality rates decline in nations, the likelihood of such nations encountering more adulthood diseases increases. With nations further developing, they begin to adapt Western traditions such as unhealthy dietary habits and lifestyles. Currently, the highest risk factors for death across the globe are smoking, poor diet and high blood pressure. Through interventions and policies provided to the public, the death and disability rates for noncommunicable diseases could decrease drastically, and most of these programs are inexpensive as well. Furthermore, depression and other mental health issues that go unchecked or undiagnosed are contributing heavily to disability and ill health across the globe. If such a trend continues over the coming years, it is estimated that mental health issues will be the leading cause of ill health in the next decade. Also, more epidemics and pandemics are rising, and the global community is unable to prevent or effectively stop the spread of these diseases. With the rise and continuation of countless diseases and conditions, it is abundantly clear the global efforts to better health are nowhere near complete.

While new challenges toward global health continue to emerge, efforts are taking place, handling old challenges alongside the new ones. This can be attributed to the overall inequality of health care access and quality between regions. The states that are better off have a wide array of access to trained professionals in the field of medicine, whereas less developed areas do not. Not only this, but a significant portion of the global population cannot utilize the healthcare available without heavy financial burden, leaving many to go without treatment. There are several outcomes that result from this situation as well; there is a severe life expectancy gap between richer and poor states. Moreover, there can also be gaps between the rich and poor within a singular region, such as the United States. Though breakthroughs have been made in health and disease on a global scale, the issue of providing basic, minimal healthcare to all those who need it is still incredibly relevant. Support for universal health coverage stems from these issues, as more people advocate for equal access to healthcare, regardless of costs.

Similar to the gap in access to healthcare, there is also a gap in countries benefiting from the evolution of research and development in health and disease. Many nations are turning toward organizations such as the WHO (World Health Organization), the Global Fund and others to provide support. Through the efforts of the global community, the health among the international system will be determined, hopefully with even further progress being made.