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What's on today – Wednesday 20 May

Committee A will open this morning and continue the discussion on Item 14.1 WHO's work in health emergencies.

Important items on the agenda scheduled for today:

- 14.2 Strengthening the evidence base for public health and social measures (continued)
- 14.4 Implementation of resolution WHA75.11
- 14.5 Public health implications of the unprovoked attacks by the Islamic Republic of Iran on civilians and essential civilian infrastructure in Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Jordan
- 11 Recommitting to accelerate progress towards malaria elimination
- 12.3 Communicable diseases
- 12.1 Follow-up to the political declaration of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases
- 12.2 Mental health
- 12.4 Universal health coverage

Relevant items in Committee B include:

- 17.1, 17.2 Health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan

Please consult the [Daily Journal No.3](#) for today

Tuesday 19 May 2026 Highlights

WHO-Director General's address to member states

The Plenary opened on Tuesday with an [address](#) by Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, highlighting core global health priorities and the pressing global health challenges facing member states, including the declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern over Ebola disease in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda, which has tragically led to health workers losing their lives.

Dr Tedros explicitly recognized that the largest part of the world's shortage of 11 million health workers is nurses, as shown by last year's landmark *State of the World's Nursing* report – which ICN co-chaired – and that this shortfall must be urgently closed. He also highlighted rising and unacceptable attacks on health care, calling them "the alarming and illegal new normal of conflict," echoing ICN's urgent calls to protect nurses and all health workers, including through #NursesForPeace.

Committee A and B discussions

Committee A resumed Item 13.3 *Open ended Intergovernmental Working Group on the WHO Pandemic Agreement*.

Committee A approved the draft decision recommended by the Intergovernmental Working Group on the WHO Pandemic Agreement, contained in the Annex of A79/8. Following the resumed sixth IGWG meeting that closed on 1 May 2026, Member States agreed additional time was needed, and the next (seventh) IGWG meeting is scheduled for 6–17 July 2026.

Debate reflected concerns from low- and middle-income countries which pushed for mandatory benefit sharing, guaranteed access to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics in exchange for rapid pathogen-data sharing. Versus high-income countries favouring more flexible, voluntary commitments while protecting the pharmaceutical innovation ecosystem. Because the Pandemic Agreement cannot open for signature until the Annex is adopted, the extension effectively defers entry-into-force of the entire instrument.

The next items discussed were 13.1 *Report of the Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme together with 13.2 Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005)*.

Discussion centred on WHO's emergency operations, States Parties' core-capacity gaps, and continued operationalization of the IHR amendments adopted on 1 June 2024. Delegates linked the IOAC's findings to ongoing outbreaks, including a fresh Ebola situation and hantavirus concerns flagged at the Assembly's opening, and to the broader global health architecture reform conversation related to the unprecedented cuts in foreign aid. Committee A noted the report on item 13.1.

The afternoon session discussed 14.1 WHO's work in health emergencies and 14.2 Strengthening the evidence base for public health and social measures.

The majority of statements made by Member States were in relation to 14.1. which provided an update on strengthening health emergency prevention, preparedness, response and resilience and many Member States highlighted the importance of multilateralism and WHO's leadership in responding to health emergencies.



ICN delivered a [statement](#) on item 14.1 highlighting the immense toll that conflict takes on the safety and mental health of health workers. ICN urged all states and parties to armed conflict to fulfil their obligations under international humanitarian law and protect

Following a vote, draft resolution [A79/A/CONF./2](#) was rejected with 30:19 votes. Additionally, following a vote, draft decision [A79/A/CONF./3](#) was approved with 95:2 votes. These agenda items were suspended and when they resume Member States

will be given the right to comment on their votes before the agenda item is concluded.

Key side events

WHPA Side Event: Health is Wealth: Why Investing in Health Professionals Pays Off



ICN President José Luis Cobos Serrano spoke at a key side event hosted by the World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA), the coalition representing the world's doctors, nurses, pharmacists, dentists and physiotherapists, of which ICN is a founding member. ICN Alliance of Student and Early Career Nurses Steering Committee Chair Josephine Agyei also delivered remarks and ICN CEO Howard Catton (current WHPA chair), ICN 1st Vice-President Sineva Ribeiro attended.

The event made the evidence-based case that health professionals are not a cost but a powerful investment, with strong returns for population health, social stability, and economic growth.

The ICN President's speech emphasized the vital importance of interprofessional collaboration to build healthier societies, stressed the crucial returns on investing in health professionals, and called for a fundamental shift toward prevention, chronic care, and home-based models. Dr Cobos Serrano discussed the current Ebola outbreak, where nurses still lack basic PPE and urged action to protect nurses and all health professionals and avoid repeating the devastating mistakes made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Josephine Agyei, SECN Alliance chair, delivered remarks on behalf of the next generation of nurses. She spoke about the significance of SECN to the nursing community and wider health care and highlighted the urgent need to invest in students and early career nurses, who are entering practice during one of the most demanding periods in global healthcare yet continue to lead, innovate, and advocate in practice, research, and policy.

Global Health System Redesign Lab

The ICN President spoke at the session "From Proliferation to Purposeful Progress of AI," hosted by the Health Parliament and Global Commission for 21st Century Healthcare.

Dr Cobos Serrano emphasized that a resilient future starts with bold investment in nurses, and the future of health



care is human-led and technology-enabled. To build strong health systems, he called for bold investment in nursing, including empowering nurse leadership and equipping the nursing workforce with well-designed AI tools and digital infrastructure that support human-centred care. He emphasized that scaling up primary health care, supported by smart technologies, could save 60 million lives by 2030 – and that nurses are central to making that vision real.

The ICN President delivered a clear message:

“A resilient future starts with bold investment in nurses, and the future of health care is human led and technology enabled. To build resilient systems, we must invest boldly in nurses and equip them with the AI tools, digital infrastructure, and data systems that unlock their full expertise.”

Scaling up primary health care, supported by smart technologies, could save 60 million lives by 2030. Nurses are central to making that vision real.

Sustaining the Global Health and Care Workforce Agenda in times of financial challenges

ICN CEO Howard Catton attended this official WHO side event, co-organized by the WMA and Germany. The session focused on sustaining investment in the health workforce amidst current global health financing pressures, with a core message that the health workforce is essential for resilient health systems, universal health coverage, and all global health goals.

Healthy Longevity as a Life-Course Investment Strategy: Integrating Prevention, Primary Care, Productivity and Digital Innovation

ICN's Gillian Moore attended the session *Healthy Longevity as a Life-Course Investment Strategy: Integrating Prevention, Primary Care, Productivity and Digital Innovation*, co-hosted by WISH (World Innovation Summit for Health – Qatar Foundation), Qatar, Finland, Japan, Thailand, the International Federation on Ageing (IFA), WFPHA, and WONCA.



Speakers discussed the key actions needed to “add life to years as well as years to life” and emphasized that healthy longevity requires urgent investment in equitable, person-centred primary healthcare and prevention strategies throughout the entire life course. The health workforce is central to the primary and preventive person-centred care that supports people to thrive at every stage of life.

From COVID-19 lessons to action: the evolution of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme



ICN Senior Policy Advisor Hoi Shan Fokeladeh attended the strategic roundtable - *From COVID-19 lessons to action*. WHA79 marks over six years since WHO declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, and a decade since the WHO Health Emergencies Programme was established. This Roundtable offered an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and how they have informed broader institutional reforms and commitments across WHO. Global public health leaders discussed how innovations developed during and after the pandemic are shaping responses to emergencies in complex settings. The discussion also explored how these advances strengthen national capacities and complement Member State efforts to enhance pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The panel reinforced the importance of investing in the health workforce as a key element of emergency preparedness.

To access the meeting recording [here](#)

WHA79 Belgium Networking Reception – Access to Medicines, Innovation, and AMR

ICN Senior Policy Advisor Erica Burton attended this networking reception, hosted by H.E. Ambassador Christophe Payot Permanent Representative of Belgium, and had

the opportunity to connect with a number of Member State and non-state actor representatives working in public health, medicine, pharmacy, palliative care, education and other areas of government. The event was co-hosted by Dr. Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director, who has consistently positioned nursing and the broader health workforce at the center of his strategic vision for European healthcare. He frequently advocates for safe staffing levels, better mental health support, and the elevated political recognition of nurses as the backbone of resilient health systems.

WHA79 High-Level Roundtable on Self-Care and Men's Health

ICN CEO Howard Catton attended this roundtable hosted by Global Action on Men's Health, Global Self-Care Federation, and Opella, which launched a new report, "Advancing Men's Self-Care: A Global Health Policy Imperative".

Bilateral Meetings

The ICN President and CEO held multiple bilateral meetings throughout the day, including with Latvian health and nursing leaders, Palau nurses, and representatives from the International Confederation of Midwives and World Organization of Family Doctors.



ICN President José Luis Cobos Serrano and ICN CEO Howard Catton with Latvian Health Minister and lead nurse



ICN President and CEO with World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) President and leaders



ICN President and CEO with nurse leaders from Palau



ICN / ICM (International Confederation of Midwives) meeting: The ICN President and CEO met with ICM leadership to strengthen inter-professional collaboration for women, children and families. Both organizations reaffirmed their shared commitment to delivering safer, more accessible, people-centred care. Strengthening the bond between nurses and midwives strengthens health systems worldwide!

Press Release

Tuesday's press release, "[ICN brings nursing powers to World Health Assembly amidst global health crises](#)", reinforces that the nursing workforce is central to every WHA79 priority – from health emergencies to primary health care, mental health, and the economics of health for all.

Social media highlights

ICN - International Council of Nurses @ICNurses · 15h

At #WHA79, ICN is bringing the power of nursing to the centre of global health decision-making.

From urgent health emergencies & outbreaks to PHC, mental health & healthcare in conflict, every WHA priority depends on a strong nursing workforce.

This World Health Assembly, we

Show more

ICN BRINGS NURSING POWER TO 79TH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

World Health Professions Alliance (WHPA)

1,201 followers · 15h · Edited

Live from WHPA's side event at #WHA79: ICN President José Luis Cobos Serrano urges World Health Organization to keep health workforce issues central to its agenda

World Health Professions Alliance fdi fip ICN WHO

Health workforce issues must remain central to WHO's agenda, even faced with the current funding difficulties. The workforce is fundamental to achieving SMC, patient safety, emergency preparedness and the wider Economics of Health for All agenda.

ICN - International Council of Nurses @ICNurses

With health emergencies high on @WHO #WHA79 agenda, tragic news of nurse & health worker deaths from Ebola virus reinforces the urgent need for a protected, resilient, prepared health workforce.

@DrTedros

ICN-International Council of Nurses

At #WHA79, ICN reaffirmed a clear message: health is the foundation of global security and peace.

In a statement delivered by Senior Policy Advisor Erica Burton, RN, MPH, CGIC, ICN strongly condemned all attacks on health care and called for urgent action to protect health workers, patients, and facilities.

Read our WHA79 statements: <https://bit.ly/4tq0Mini>

Explore our key messages: <https://bit.ly/4u49QyJ>

#OurNursesOurFuture #NursesforPeace

00:12

ICN-International Council of Nurses

47,913 followers · 17h · Edited

Strengthening the bond between nurses and midwives strengthens health systems worldwide!

Great meeting between ICN President José Luis Cobos Serrano, ICN

ICN-International Council of Nurses

42,913 followers · 22h · Edited

LIVE from the #WHA79 Side Event "Reimagining the 21st Century Health Care Systems" hosted by the Global Commission for 21st Century Healthcare (GC21CH)

ICN - International Council of Nurses @ICNurses · 16h

At last night's ICN and @WHO cohosted #WHA79 side event, ICN President @jacobosserrano delivered an inspiring call to action and called for structural empowerment of all nurses.

ICN's president emphasized the importance of collaborative action and called for progress grounded

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“If one person can change the world, imagine the power of the world's 30 million nurses working together with ICN and WHO!”

José Luis Cobos Serrano ICN President

ICN and WHO co-hosted #WHA79 side event: Strengthening Nursing for Global Health