

Seventy-ninth Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia

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Agenda item 8.1

Annual report on monitoring progress on UHC and health-related SDGs

The International Council of Nurses (ICN), representing over 30 million nurses worldwide, welcomes the annual report on monitoring progress on universal health coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals.

ICN especially welcomes the recommendation that Member States strengthen primary health care with particular emphasis on quality of care, NCD prevention and management, healthy ageing and equitable access to essential health services. The report's own findings show why nursing must anchor that effort: the NCD sub-index, at 53, is the weakest sub-index in every Member State, and this was the only WHO region where RMNCH coverage declined between 2015 and 2023 – precisely the services nurse-led primary care is proven to deliver. Most telling, health workforce density contributed just 11% of the Region's coverage gains since 2000. The Region has been progressing around its workforce gap; the remaining distance to the 2030 target of 80 cannot be closed the same way.

ICN's 2024 report, *Nursing and Primary Health Care: Towards the realization of Universal Health Coverage*, provides a practical pathway for this shift, including investment in the PHC nursing workforce, nurse-led care coordination, integrated team-based care, full scope of practice and advanced practice nursing.

ICN equally welcomes the thematic chapter on leveraging climate change monitoring for public health action. Nurses are both sensor and responder in a climate-informed health system: they live in the very community that is affected, staff the facilities where climate-sensitive disease first presents, recognize heat-related illness and shifting vector-borne patterns, and keep services running through floods, cyclones and heatwaves.

ICN calls on Member States to build the report's future-ready health workforce on nursing: funded positions in community-based primary care; nursing roles in climate-informed surveillance and national adaptation plan implementation; implementation of the Global Strategic Directions for Nursing and Midwifery 2021–2030 with empowered Chief Nursing Officers; and advanced practice roles for NCD management and healthy ageing.

There is no universal health coverage without nurses — and no climate-resilient health system without them either. ICN stands ready to support Member States in investing accordingly.