



## **71<sup>st</sup> WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

Provisional agenda item:

### **12.8 Rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease**

May 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and the over 20 million nurses worldwide.

Rheumatic heart disease (RHD) is a measure as to how well the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular universal health coverage, has been achieved. The presence of RHD is an indictment of our inability to protect the health of the poorest and the most vulnerable.

We call on WHO to develop global guidelines for prevention, diagnosis and evidence-based management of RHD to support Member States in addressing the burden of this disease. Globally, the health workforce is stretched but particularly where RHD is endemic. As such, ICN urges Member States to support healthcare workers to receive training, guidelines and equipment to deliver safe and effective care for people living with RHD. Increasing health literacy and awareness in healthcare professionals and in the public of the safety and efficacy of RHD primary prevention can increase early diagnosis and help to avoid disease progression.

We call on Member States to invest in the health workforce, particularly nursing, as this is pivotal to addressing the social determinants of health which are the root causes of RHD. Furthermore, Member States must ensure that the necessary diagnostic and treatment tools are available.

RHD occurs primarily in vulnerable populations including those living in deprivation, rural and isolated communities, women and girls, and Indigenous populations. The complexity of caring for vulnerable population groups is often challenging and requires significant navigation, networking and communication across health professions and other key stakeholders.

When developing policies and strategies, we suggest that populations who are most at risk be central to the development of the RHD prevention and control agenda.

Thank you.