Agenda Item:
12.3 Global Strategy for Women’s, Children’s and Adolescents’ Health (2016–2030): sexual and reproductive health, interpersonal violence, and early childhood development

Statement:

Global Health Council, supported by Living Goods, the American Academy of Pediatrics, Pathfinder International and the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, applauds WHO’s commitment to the safety, health, and wellbeing of women, children, and adolescents. We particularly commend WHO’s attention to early childhood development as well as its support for sexual and reproductive health and rights through its tracking of effective family planning delivery models and policies.

To achieve the Strategy’s goals we must address the needs of the most vulnerable populations, such as children affected by HIV or subject to violence or abuse. For example, young children living with or exposed to HIV are highly susceptible to physical, behavioral, and cognitive developmental delays. Other vulnerable groups include the roughly one billion children exposed annually to violence, children who suffer from other forms of abuse and neglect, the nearly 25 million children who have fled their homes, and children with disabilities.

We therefore welcome the new Nurturing Care Framework, which provides guidance for countries to improve development outcomes for children. The health sector’s role is critical, and maternal and child survival interventions, from maternal micronutrient supplementation to optimal breastfeeding practices, also contribute to ECD.

Achieving the Strategy’s goals also requires fully engaging community health workers (CHWs) and health professional associations. CHWs, with acute, personal knowledge of their communities, are indispensable to broadening knowledge and access to care, bridging the divide between facility and community, and increasing, care, and access. CHWs can promote safety in high-risk settings by being trained to identify and respond to signs of abuse, neglect, or violence. They can also ensure access to care to those children and families, such as those affected by HIV, who are too isolated, poor, and stigmatized to access mainstream services.