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Health: A Political Choice

Investing in Health For All



Germany has continued its commitment in taking up a leading role in global health during its German G7 presidency. When Germany welcomed the G7 health ministers to Berlin for their meeting in May 2022, the war of aggression by Russia against Ukraine had already lasted for more than three months, with millions of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the country due to the unlawful attacks by the Russian Federation. In light of the violence that Russia continues to inflict on Ukraine's sovereignty, the security of Europe and the entire world, the G7 health ministers' meeting in Berlin powerfully demonstrated the strength of multilateralism and particularly the G7's work in times of crisis. I am very pleased that my G7 colleagues and I jointly agreed to continue our support for Ukraine with a view to strengthen the functioning and rebuilding of the Ukrainian health system, now and in the future.

Considering these severe changes to the international order and the insecurities that the world is currently facing, I am also delighted that my G7 colleagues and I were able to achieve progress in addressing pressing global health challenges of the 21st century – pandemic preparedness and response, combatting antimicrobial resistance, and climate change and health.

ENHANCED DISEASE SURVEILLANCE

The global rise in monkeypox cases and the resurgence of new Covid-19 waves once again demonstrate the need for strengthened global pandemic surveillance and response mechanisms and capacities to closely monitor the spread of new and existing

Capture the moment

Under its G7 presidency, Germany has forged ahead with a pact for pandemic readiness that enhances a global network approach to public health emergencies

By Karl Lauterbach,
minister of health, Federal
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pathogens that have epidemic and pandemic potential. Even before Covid-19, but even more so during this pandemic, the G7 and the entire world witnessed the establishment of a variety of institutions that aim to enhance disease surveillance and response to detect potential outbreaks at an early stage. However, the Covid-19 pandemic also highlighted the necessity for greater alignment of these initiatives to foster a network of collaborative surveillance to effectively exchange data and rapidly respond to the dynamic development of pandemics. Only by synergising the collective knowledge of the different actors will we be able to effectively prevent and respond to current and future emerging health threats. In addition, the past has provided evidence that it is key to invest in the education, training and know-how of people who can analyse the data and detect, assess and raise the alarm if necessary. Investing in people is sometimes more sustainable than focusing only on certain infrastructure or product components. We need to improve building and investing in the workforce that is at the forefront of any detection of and rapid response to a health emergency.

FOCUS ON ACTIONS

Together with my G7 colleagues, we agreed on the necessity of a collaborative effort that will achieve this exact alignment by focusing on concrete actions, namely the G7 Pact for Pandemic Readiness. The pact is a strategic and conceptual exercise to decisively improve implementation, coordination and cooperation of our G7 actions in the area of collaborative surveillance and predictable and rapid response by

advancing a global network approach and strengthening the Public Health Emergency Workforce of the future. To achieve its objective, the G7 Pact for Pandemic Readiness has two pillars:

Under the pillar of collaborative surveillance, the goal of the pact is to strengthen interoperable and interdisciplinary cross-sector surveillance capabilities and capacities following a One Health approach, while reinforcing the global network approach by connecting regional and national nodes as well as centres of expertise. To enhance capacities, we also intend to mount structures for education and training.

Under the pillar of predictable rapid response, the G7 Pact for Pandemic Readiness will support the establishment and maintenance of professional, multi-sectoral and well-trained readiness groups, which must be embedded in the national and regional levels, while being connected globally. To invest in and strengthen the Public Health Emergency Workforce, the pact supports existing education and training networks with up-to-date curricula and by bolstering global peer and alumni networks.

The G7 Leaders' Communiqué this year endorsed the G7 Pact for Pandemic Readiness in order to accelerate the momentum and reiterated the joint commitment of all G7 partners to further align and prepare for future potential outbreaks. In the second half of the German G7 presidency, we as G7 partners are developing a roadmap for practical cooperation that will build upon the above-mentioned pillars by convening technical meetings with relevant stakeholders and the G7.

THE SILENT PANDEMIC

Additionally, we as G7 health ministers jointly addressed the so-called silent pandemic of antimicrobial resistance. In 2019, 1.27 million deaths were attributed to antibiotic resistance. An estimated 11 million people worldwide die of sepsis each year, with AMR playing an important role in this regard. These deaths must be prevented. We therefore committed to strengthening the data basis by establishing and improving integrated surveillance systems on AMR and antibiotic use following the One Health approach, strengthening the prudent use of antimicrobials, defining

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national targets and strengthening early detection, diagnosis and therapy of sepsis. Under the German presidency's lead, we were able to build upon previous G7 commitments by actively supporting the development of new antimicrobials and alternative treatments through institutions such as the Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria Biopharmaceutical Accelerator (CARB-X) and the Global Antibiotic Research and Development Partnership.

The third priority subject of this year's G7 health ministers' meeting focused on the increasingly crucial topic of climate change and health. We witness extreme weather events each year, which demonstrate the urgency to combat climate change in all areas of life, including in the health system. We need to prepare our health systems to cope with new disease patterns and demands such as an increase in the burden of disease from infectious and non-communicable diseases. As G7 health ministers, we agreed to build climate-informed health and surveillance systems that integrate socio-demographic, climate, environmental, and animal and human health data as well as early warning systems. To reduce the burden of our health systems on climate change, all G7 partners committed to the common aim of building environmentally sustainable and climate-neutral health systems at the latest by 2050.

In the collective spirit of multilateralism, the G7 health ministers were able to achieve sustainable progress in these pressing areas of global health. I look forward to following up with these commitments in the second half of the German G7 presidency, in order to progress towards a more equitable and healthier world. ■

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