

Failure to invest more for adolescent well-being could cost \$110 trillion: Report

28 May 2024 | News

While progress has been made in some areas of improving adolescent well-being, significant challenges persist



Today's adolescents, aged 10–19 years, face unprecedented challenges amidst a rapidly evolving world, according to a new report calling for greater investments in adolescent well-being.

The report, released at the 77th World Health Assembly, was commissioned by PMNCH - The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health, working with Victoria Institute of Strategic Economic Studies of Victoria University in Australia, WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA.

The report finds that failure by all stakeholders to substantially increase investment in programmes targeted at improving adolescent well-being would result in a staggering economic cost, with potential global losses amounting to an estimated \$110 trillion (benefits foregone) from 2024 to 2050. This equates to \$4.1 trillion per year, or 7.7% of the GDP of the countries included in the research for the report, which covers about 80% of the world's population.

Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand and PMNCH Board Chair, emphasised the urgency “With just about 5 years left to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, progress lagging, and the adolescent population increasing, the urgency of investing in adolescents' well-being cannot be overstated. A multi-pronged and multisectoral approach to investment - anchored in meaningful adolescent and youth engagement, accountability, transparency, and multi-stakeholder collaboration is crucial.”

The benefits of investing in adolescent well-being, however, are significant, with benefit to cost ratios (BCRs) in most cases showing economic and social returns at least 10 times the initial investment, and in many cases significantly higher. It has recently been estimated that a broad package of health services for adolescents is likely to give a return of \$9.6 for every dollar invested; while investing in education and training for adolescents is likely to give a return of \$28.6 for every dollar invested.

Five (5) domains are crucial for adolescent well-being – health and nutrition; connectedness, positive values and contribution to society; safety and a supportive environment; learning competence, education, skills and employability; and agency and

resilience.

The report's central conclusion is that the world urgently needs a new investment programme to improve the well-being of adolescents. This must be a global initiative, but it should be carried out at the local level with initiatives tailored to the realities of individual countries.