



Youth Perceptions On Reimagining The Access To Healthcare

Generations
For health

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Who draws the gap between people?
They call them rich, they call them poor.
The rich squander in wealth and abundance,
The poor wonder what to eat next time.

Who allows injustice as iron fists
Smashing down the humble dignity
of the weak, elevating the powerful
to decide what for the poor is best?

Elizabeth Padillo Olesen

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Introduction

A common saying is that "health is wealth." It can determine how we grow and live. Health is also a human right that is fundamental to the development of a more equitable society. Everyone should be able to access the healthcare system, find trusted professionals who can provide quality treatment, and receive a certain level of coverage so as to not become indebted by medical costs. Improving access to comprehensive, quality healthcare services is a step towards health equity, but it is far from the last effort possible to uphold health as a human right in societies.

It is estimated that in the United States of America, the wealthiest nation on earth, that the most affluent 1% live on average 15 years longer than the poorest 1% (Amadeo, 2020). This is one of the many aspects which define the inequality that pervades numerous national health systems. The financial burden compromises the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. But it is not the only determinant of access to healthcare, as food security and living conditions, to name a few, can influence individuals' health outcomes.

COVID-19 has also demonstrated that a country's wealth does not necessarily dictate the success of a health system. Spain, Italy, and UK alone account for 21% of the world's death toll from Covid-19 despite all having health systems which rank within the top 10 in the world (The Local, 2017; NYT, 2020). The infrastructure can be there, but if the number of available health professionals is minimal then treatment can be delayed or avoided altogether. This is a common problem in rural areas worldwide. In fact, half of the world's populations are in small, rural communities and yet fewer resources including human capital are dedicated to them (International Labor Organization, 2017).

COVID-19 has exposed the weak points and capacities of health systems worldwide, and demonstrated that this problem is not isolated to such countries. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of public health, from disease surveillance to all-hazards preparedness and response. It has clearly laid out areas for policy development and organizational competencies revisions. More importantly, COVID-19 has shown that only through collaboration and through human-centered approach to health can the human right to health become a reality. It is apparent that the human right to health has been jeopardized, and that its guarantee depends on the inclusion of youth, who will inherit these systems, to become agents of change.

We must advocate for policy changes demanding from the health sector to be more financially, geographically and culturally accessible. This can begin to encourage people to practice more positive health-seeking behavior, having regular check-ups and focusing on prevention of diseases. It is imperative to take this chance to think about the past, and ask ourselves to do better in the future. Youth will have the immense responsibility of integrating lessons from the pandemic, or at least holding officials accountable to the future of global health governance.

Already youth have significantly contributed both at local and global levels to the efforts to limit the spread of COVID-19. Young people have proven themselves resourceful despite difficulties and movement restriction policies. They have joined or started volunteer initiatives to meet the needs of their communities. A 24-year old Xian Lu, inspired by the sacrifices of health workers, moved to Wuhan and volunteered to cook meals for the medical staff for 40 days, preparing over 20,000 meals (Xinhua, 2020). Al4GOV in the Philippines is working with national agencies to develop a COVID-19 digital triage bot for medical professionals to triage cases and create predictive modelling of people infected (Youth Co.Lab, 2020).

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Youth will have the immense responsibility of integrating lessons from the pandemic

At Generations for Health, we believe that the 1.8 billion young people, with unique backgrounds and experiences, should have a voice to inspire and the opportunity to change the world. There are few spaces where youth and health leaders come together, where the exchange of ideas can happen on equal footing. Generations for Health tries to reconcile this by creating that space for dialogue, where pressing challenges of global health can be tackled in horizontal discussions. Through these dialogues, our initiative aims to empower youth to speak up, to feel confident in demanding change, and to support them in making it happen. Each dialogue has a different theme, and for each theme we collect youth opinion to generate insightful reports to share with our partners and the world. These can serve as an opportunity for organizations to reassess efforts and hear the voices of youth.



We have designed this report with the support of survey data to focus on youth opinion on emerging issues during the COVID-19 pandemic such as access to healthcare services and global health governance. We want to contribute to the understanding of youth perceptions on the right to health, national health expenditure, private-public partnerships, barriers to access to healthcare and vaccine distribution. Because at the end of it all, as this pandemic has demonstrated, ensuring access to healthcare for everyone will require the involvement of every actor, including the youth.

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The Right To Health

Over fifty years ago, the right to health was enshrined in the constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) and was recognized as a human right in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Attention to this right is now growing worldwide with the calming of the pandemic. COVID-19 has showcased that the neglecting of other human rights had serious health consequences. For example, the rate of literacy, as a function of the right to education, can significantly improve health outcomes and make individuals less prone to believe false information (Sircar et al., 2020). Additionally, the right to clean water has been critical, as sanitation services have been found to reduce the rate of infection (Freeman et al., 2017). Human rights are interdependent, and prompt action is needed to guarantee them to all peoples.

International treaties treat all human rights to be inclusive, which means that the right to health extends beyond providing timely, appropriate health care. It is expected that policies addressing underlying determinants such as potable water or safe housing need to be integrated into the health systems and responses. 109 out of 193 countries recognize the right to health in their national constitutions, which compromises that ensuring healthcare services are available to everyone without discrimination. Following the pandemic, there is an opportunity to protect this invaluable human right to health to all citizens. Articles 55 and 56 of the Charter of the United Nations (UN) finds that international cooperation for the realization of human rights is an obligation of all States, which can be effectively used to promote a more rights-based approach to health. This would reframe global health governance, admit the interrelation of all human rights, and support integrating the dimension of human rights to health-related policies.

Only 18% of youth respondents believed that universal healthcare coverage is sufficient to provide the human right to health. More than 50% said that healthcare must be indiscriminately and inclusively provided. Although the cost of care is usually mentioned to absolve health actors from taking action to realize the right to health, 71% of our youth respondents considered the lack of available health services or staff to be one of the greatest barriers to accessing healthcare services, which is a critical statistic discussed later. It is thus an opportunity for healthcare actors and youth to collaborate on addressing the underlying reasons preventing the securing of the right to health.

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Barriers To Accessing Health Services

During the COVID-19 pandemic, existing barriers to accessing healthcare have become more visible. These barriers may be found at different levels. It may depend on individuals' socio-economic status, on the health system of a certain country, or on the attention that health receives in political agendas.

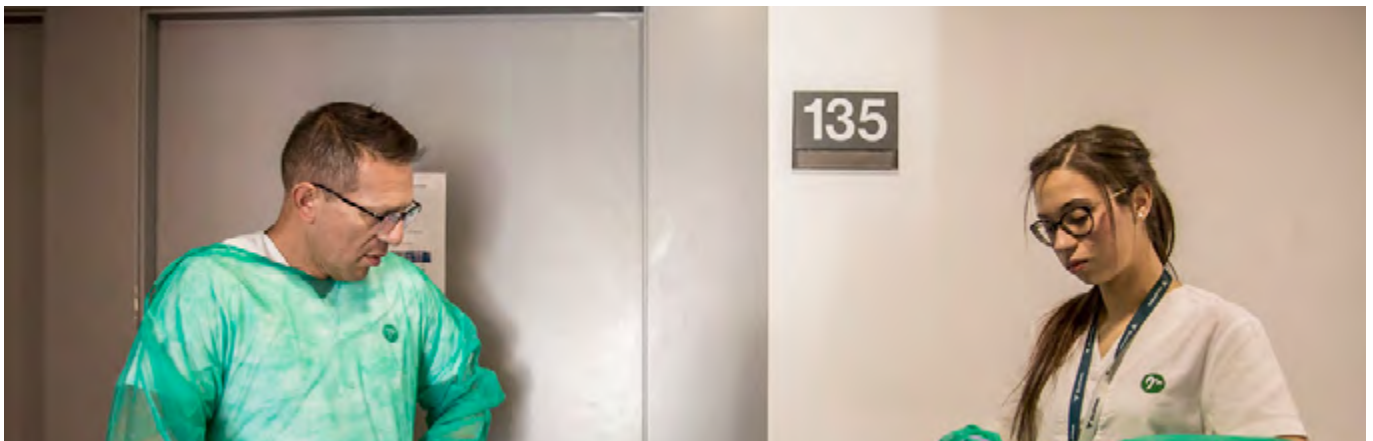
71% of our youth respondents found the lack of available health services or staff to be the greatest barrier in the access to healthcare. This perception may have been caused by the current situation, which has led to shortages of medical resources and personnel worldwide caused by an unprecedented

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demand for health care workers and medical equipment and treatment everywhere. Only 12% of our youth respondents considered that the greatest barrier to accessing healthcare is the lack of transportation services or road infrastructures. 49% of our youth respondents believed inadequate or no insurance coverage is one the greatest barriers to accessing healthcare, and 52% the high cost of care. There is a global need to invest in health systems, and to provide them with more personal and medical resources to guarantee access to adequate healthcare.

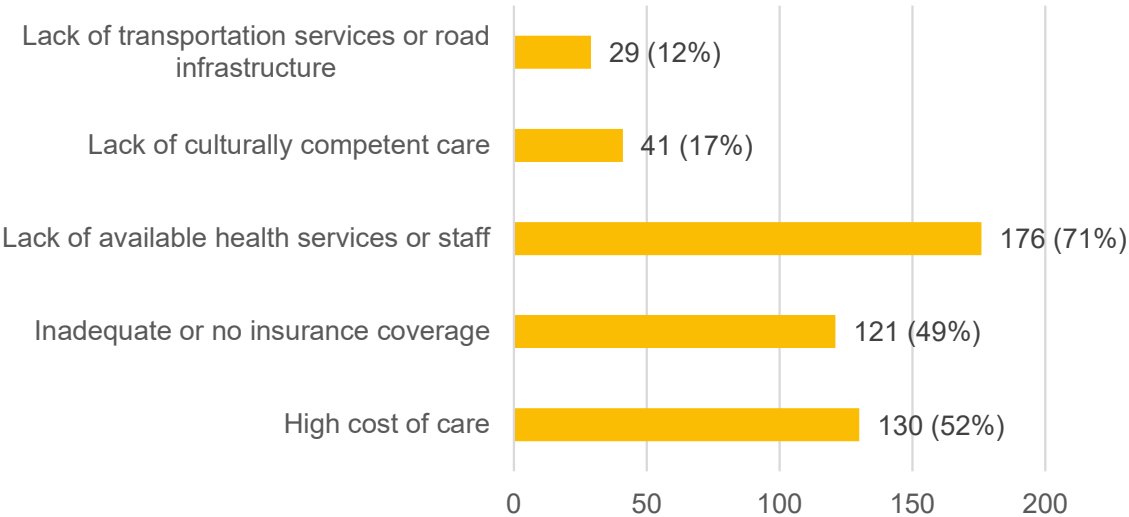
Often, the lack of political will in the health sector is a barrier to access healthcare services. The level of attention healthcare receives depends on the political will to develop an equitable, comprehensive health system. 35% of our youth respondents believe healthcare is receiving moderate attention by their governments. However, only 8% considered that healthcare is a priority in their countries' political agendas, while 33% believe that healthcare is receiving "no attention" to "little attention" in their countries. Nonetheless, COVID-19 has forced health to become a priority in every country's agenda for the first time in decades. This may be an opportunity for health and access to healthcare to receive more attention in every country's political agenda, and to promote further cooperation between actors at national, regional and global level.

"We tend to think of health in technical terms, but health can only be fixed politically. COVID-19 has shown that it is not the richness of a country which makes a health system work, but rather the will to have stamina in a society to fund health." - Dr Unni Karunakara



An important, but overlooked threat to ensuring global health is climate change. It can affect the spread of infectious diseases due to alterations in temperatures and the weather, deforestation or pollution, between others. In the survey, we asked the youth if they considered climate change contributes to the spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19. The answers of our respondents are varied. While 44% of our respondents believe that climate change contributes "highly" to "very highly" to the spread of infectious diseases, 25% believe that it only contributes moderately, and 31% think that it has had a small contribution to no contribution at all. This highlights the need to raise awareness on the link between climate health and the spread of infectious diseases among the youth. The contribution of climate change to the spread of infectious diseases should also be taken into consideration in any national or international health agenda.

What would you consider is the greatest barrier to accessing healthcare services?



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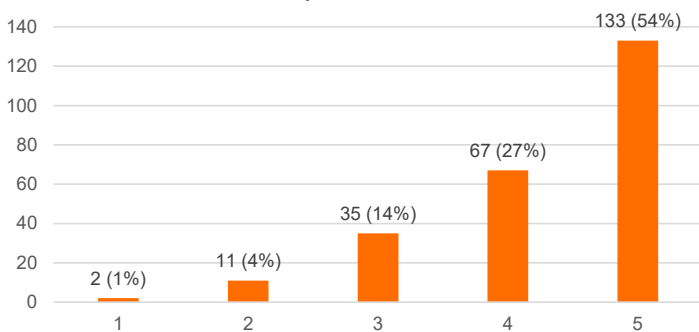
Cooperation Between Health Actors

Providing universal healthcare coverage and accessible healthcare services to all citizens of the world is an ambitious aspiration. It will require coordinated efforts of numerous health actors, and the reimagining of the current health governance system; youth delegates highlighted the need for inclusive, effective restructuring. COVID-19 demonstrated that no health system is immune to reaching maximum capacity or complete collapse, effectively underscoring the pitfalls of low-cost, single source commodity supply chains and a weak primary care system. It is now the opportunity to shape health governance beyond its historical roots into the future.

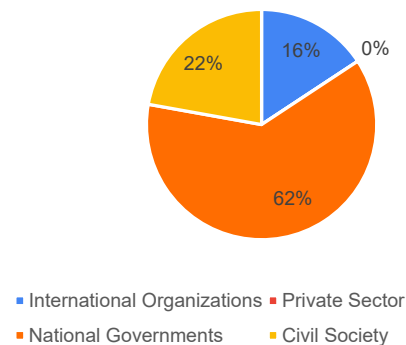
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62% of youth respondents found that national governments had the responsibility to combat the global crisis of COVID-19, and only 8% thought that healthcare was receiving enough attention as part of their country's political agenda. But around 22% of respondents believed that civil society also had a role to play in the efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19. Some delegates mentioned in the dialogue that citizens need to follow quarantine and curfew policies, and take responsibility for their actions. Unlike for international organizations, none of the respondents thought that the private sector should be the leading actor in this global crisis.

To what extent do you believe cooperation between international actors and governments is necessary to restore "normality" once the COVID-19 pandemic passes?



Who do you think has the main responsibility for combating the global crisis of COVID-19?



The pandemic has made apparent that united and coordinated efforts are needed to combat the virus' spread, and there is the potential for collaboration between national governments and international organizations following the pandemic. In fact, 54% of respondents believed that cooperation between international actors and governments is necessary to restore "normality" once the COVID-19 pandemic passes. This opinion may stem from the perception that there is a lack of cooperation between public and private institutions in the health sector, as only 4% definitively believed that cooperation between those institutions was sufficient.

It is difficult to tackle all the pressing challenges to health systems during a pandemic. But there are a few areas where youth see an opportunity for effective changes. About 48% of respondents said that public health records, data, and information should be shared between countries to inform health policies and programs. Nonetheless, as delegates mentioned, data privacy and encrypted

communication is critical to prevent the misuse of information. Only about 7% disavored such change in the global health governance system, which suggests that this should be explored in the reimagining of current health structures.

An overwhelming majority, 90% of respondents, advocated for the COVID-19 vaccine to be a public good, amplifying the campaign's "People's Vaccine" call for the vaccine to be provided free of charge to everyone, everywhere. Days before the World Health Assembly, leaders including the president of South Africa and the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, signed an open letter pointing to the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. But this is not only being asked by health leaders, but also the people who are overwhelmingly being affected by the pandemic. Having the vaccine free-for-all would be a stance by the current global health governance that the right to health does not discriminate, and that no one country should be ahead of the curve. This pandemic needs us all to unite fronts and find the humanity in each of us to extend a hand to one another.

"COVID-19 has shown us the failure of the way we organise ourselves as humanity" - Leith Greenslade

It is still too early to evaluate all consequences that COVID-19 is going to have on society. However, crises like these reveal what problems are to be addressed for us to go beyond them. This time is an opportunity to rethink our social dynamics and political institutions.

We hope to have planted the seed for the beginning of a greater debate on how health governance needs to be redefined. Many questions are left unanswered: how to coordinate between local and global responses, or how private and public actors should combine efforts to uphold the human right to health. These are complex issues, and there is no clear answer to them. But one thing remains clear - youth voices are vital to reimagining global health governance and institutions.

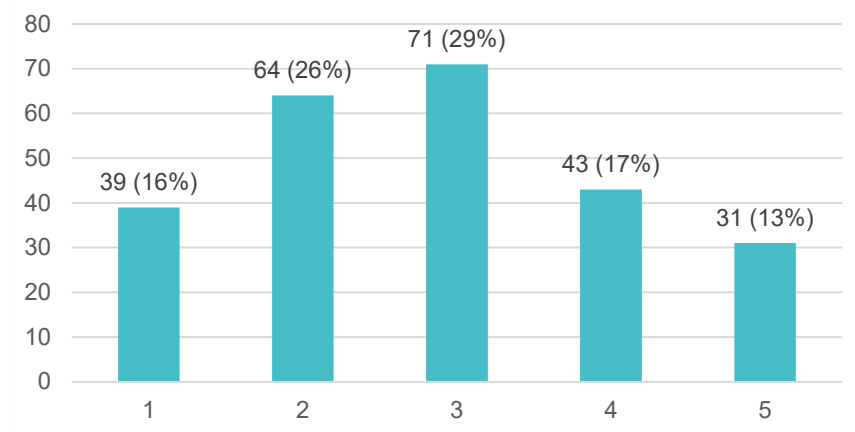
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Role of Youth

During the COVID-19 crisis, the youth has again shown the potential they have in bringing a positive change and finding innovative and creative solutions to the challenges faced by their countries. All over the world, we have seen youth-led initiatives to give response to the scourges caused by COVID-19 in their communities. Raising awareness about preventive measures, collecting food and other material for the most vulnerable groups, distributing masks and soaps are only some of the initiatives led by youth. Young people are important agents of change and, empowered, can lead the way to achieve "health for all". Now more than ever, it is clear that any society that does not succeed in tapping into the energy and creativity of its youth will be left behind.

To what extent do you feel youth are empowered to contribute to health governance decisions?



Although the role of youth is essential in promoting access to healthcare, 71% of the respondents thought that the youth is moderately empowered to disempowered to contribute to health governance decisions, illustrating the lack of power they perceive they have to influence health decisions at both national and international level. Only 13% of the respondents thought they are highly empowered to influence health governance decisions. According to the responses of youth delegates, governmental institutions, private companies and international organizations are perceived as distant from the youth, believing their opinions are not considered in the decision-making process, some of them highlighting the lack of permanent mechanisms, especially for the underaged.

"Oftentimes, youth are overlooked and underrepresented in their governments. There is a generational gap, especially in the health sector, where we feel there is no place for us" - Emily Liao

During the group discussion, these views were emphasized. Youth delegates drew attention to the underrepresentation of the youth in the governments and other decision-making bodies, and the need to have an intersectional approach on youth empowerment, finding ways to make inclusivity critical to all efforts. These figures underline the need of finding new ways to listen to youth's opinions and promote youth participation in health governance decisions.

Conclusions

Like Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, said “young people are an enormous asset to our societies. We must cherish them, invest in them and empower them”. The youth will be the ones paying the price of today's decisions and the ones taking over the lead in their countries in the next decades.

The results of the survey have denoted that the youth consider important the right to health, supporting further cooperation between health actors to ensure access to healthcare everywhere. Nonetheless, there is a general view that the right to health and access to healthcare haven't received enough attention by their countries' political agendas.

Ensuring the right to health and access to adequate health services requires the cooperation of every actor, and the youth should be included in these efforts. For that, the creation of mechanisms that can promote the participation of the youth in the health sector and empower them to make them able to contribute to health governance decisions is necessary not just to overcome the crisis of the COVID-19, but to ensure the access to healthcare and the right to health for everyone.

At Generations for Health, we want to give the youth the space to raise their voices and to share their opinions and views with those who take the important decisions. Young people will live the consequences of the successes and mistakes of today's decisions and, therefore, should have a seat at the table.

Now more than ever, the COVID-19 pandemic has made evident how closely intertwined is the right to health with other human rights, and how important it is to work together in order to ensure a sustainable future. Investing in health is investing in the future and welfare of all of us



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