WUF11 SESSION CONCEPT NOTE

TACKLING URBAN HEALTH CHALLENGES IN A CHANGING WORLD

1. **List of Partners Contributing to the Session:**

- WHO
- UNECE
- ICRC
- Global Commission on Drug Policy
- Geneva Cities Hub

2. **Key Words:**

Urban health, healthy cities, COVID-19 pandemic response, pandemic prevention, preparedness

3. **Objectives of the Session:**

- To present and discuss the major health challenges facing city governments.
- To understand the links between social determinants of health, environmental exposures, behaviour, health outcomes and urban policies.
- To explore the impact of city design and governance on urban health, and the role of local and national governments in tackling health challenges.
- Present good examples of urban preparedness, response and recovery from public health outbreaks, most recent being the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Discuss opportunities and ways forward for the effective promotion of urban health in design, planning and governance.
- To discuss the main health issues in cities in conflict and those affect by it.

4. **Summary:**

As the world transitions through a global pandemic and against a background of unprecedented urbanization, extreme climate events, and conflicts, the health of urban populations is increasingly at risk. Health services are pushed to breaking point and often, classic public health interventions are the only option to protect vulnerable citizens. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing health inequities.

Delivering health services is increasingly relying on multi-sectoral approaches, requiring city authorities to develop new governance approaches and innovations to deliver health. Many diseases are effectively managed by modifying the living environment, so planning of urban areas, access to open-space, good housing and environmental services are critical. As WHO defines good health as both physical health and well-being, healthy urban space can support better outcomes

Given the speed with which many isolated diseases can quickly reach pandemic proportions, the role of city leaders is now recognized as an effective, nimble implementing partner. Understanding their capacities will be important to manage future pandemics.

In conflict settings, aside from injuries sustained, migration-induced urban growth to neighbouring- regions and countries, places an additional burden on weak health services.

Re-thinking urban space is thus important to tackle health both in re-design of existing cities and towns, and also for the many urban areas yet to be built. By "designing-out" ill health, we can ensure that significant gains in health, achieved through treatment campaigns, can be maintained. This is equally important in cities in the global south and north. Healthy environments go hand-in-hand with good urban design.

This session will present a range of health challenges faced by city leaders and some of the new approaches to managing disease, including tracking, managing disease epidemics and prevention through improved urban design

5. **Guiding Questions for Discussions:**

- How is urbanization affecting the health and well-being of populations? What are the main challenges and inequalities?
- What have we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of preparedness, response and recovery in urban contexts? How can this inform future action?
- What are the policies and governance measures that can be put in place to address gaps and identify opportunities?
- What are the resulting challenges in cities in conflict including those as a result of migration
- What can stakeholders, national governments and local governments do?
- How can we assess the needs and provide tools for improvement?

6. **Expected Outcomes and Impact:**

- Presenting global context and strategic priorities for urban health.
- Identifying challenges, opportunities for local action.
- Discussing best practices from local governments.
- The promotion and soft launch of four technical approaches and tools on achieving health in urban settings.
- New policy direction that could be pursued to enable more effective health management.

7. **Outline the Format of the Session:**

The session will consist of speeches, presentations, and panel discussions. It will be divided to four parts, following the (5-minute) welcoming remarks by the session organizer:
1. A high-level panel will present global strategic priorities and importance of tackling urban health challenges (25 minutes)
2. Keynote Addresses will set the scene by presenting how cities can be designed for healthy outcomes and what are the global trends in urban health (20 minutes)
3. A panel of practitioners will discuss the role of local authorities in the prevention, preparedness and response to urban health challenges (50 minutes)
4. Presentation and soft launch of technical tools supporting urban health (15 minutes)
5. Closing (5 minutes)