

**The Role of the Health Sector in Supporting Early Childhood Development:
Building Human Capital Along the Life Course**

11 March 2024, 9:00 – 12:30 EAT

Conference Sub-theme: Systems strengthening with a spotlight on workforce development

Objectives:

This half-day session will provide delegates with an opportunity to:

- Discuss the role of the health sector in supporting early childhood as a critical period for building the foundations for human capital.
- Illustrate with practical examples from countries what can be done to strengthen systems to be more responsive to the needs of caregivers and enable young children to thrive.
- Reflect on lessons learned with respect to workforce development for early childhood development in the sub-region and beyond.
- Identify priority actions that can enable the health sector alongside other sectors to contribute to efforts in early childhood development that will build human capital.

Summary:

The *Lancet series: Advancing early childhood development: from science to scale* (2016) and the *Framework for nurturing care to enable children to survive and thrive to transform health and human potential* (2018) have clearly provided the evidence why it is important to invest in early childhood to build foundations for human capital and provided a roadmap for actions that governments and partners must take.

Five years following the launch, the *Nurturing care framework progress report (2018 – 2023)* has demonstrated the interest and commitment of a wide range of governments and stakeholders to translate the evidence into action, and work towards the enabling environments that allow children to survive and thrive.

Many sectors have a role to play. Amongst them, the health sector is in a unique position to support families, caregivers, and children, because of the frequent contacts that they have with health services, starting from pregnancy along the life course.

Evidence-based interventions have been documented, including as part of WHO guidelines on early childhood development and prevention of child maltreatment. The challenge that countries face is supporting their scale up with quality, to achieve effective coverage.

In this session, we will discuss the role of the health sector in supporting early childhood development. Through practical examples from different countries, we will discuss strategies for strengthening services and then zoom in on building the capabilities of the workforce to support caregivers of young children in their caregiving capacities.

We will also discuss how governments are strengthening maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) services to address responsive caregiving and caregiver mental health in facilities and communities, how paediatricians are taking it in their stride to make paediatric services more family and child-friendly, how digital technologies and behavioural change communication approaches can



amplify individual and group contacts, how guidelines and job aids are being strengthened to integrate nurturing care, and how various stakeholders and how the work of diverse stakeholders can inform efforts to strengthen pre-service and continuing education.

The half-day session will include presentations, panel discussions, work in small groups, and a life drawing board to summarize key challenges and actions for progress.

Presenters and facilitators will be drawn from government, health professionals, civil society organizations, regional and global offices.

Global, regional, and country-specific resources will be demonstrated, and links provided.