

# THE FRONTLINE HEALTH WORKERS COALITION:

Comments for World Health Assembly 2015



*The Frontline Health Workers Coalition (FHWC) – an alliance of 41 United States-based organizations including INGOs, private sector organizations, health worker trade associations and advocacy campaigns working together to urge greater and more strategic U.S. investment in frontline health workers in the developing world – submits the following comments on WHA Agenda Items 14.2 (Health in the post-2015 development agenda) and 16.1 (Ebola outbreak and follow-up to Special Session of the EB on Ebola).*

## **Comments on WHA Agenda Item 14.2 Health in the post-2015 development agenda**

In April 2015, the International Labour Organization reported that 50% of the world's rural population, including 77% of Africa's rural population, live without critical access to crucial health services precisely because of health workforce shortages in these areas. These alarming findings only further underscore that addressing severe gap in access to properly trained and supported health workers on the frontlines of care is critical to achieving every health goal and target in discussion in the post-2015 development agenda.

FHWC reiterates its recommendation that the United States and other member states should support the following during negotiations for the Sustainable Development Goals:

- A target inclusive of all countries that sets measurable goals to strengthen the global health workforce and increase financing for human resources for health.
- An explicit recognition that improving access to health workers, including community health workers, is a crucial and indispensable requisite to achieving universal health coverage (UHC).

Inextricably linked to the effectiveness of SDG targets on health will be the strength of the 2016-2030 Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health, currently under development by the World Health Organization for consideration at the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly in May 2016. FHWC urges the United States to support a bold and financed strategy with specific targets, timelines and commitments for ensuring that by 2030:

- All communities, including poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups, will have access to competent health workers, trained and supported to save lives and improve health and nutrition;
- All countries will have the health workforce and systems needed to contain and prevent existing and emerging public health threats.

FHWC's detailed recommendations for the Global HRH Strategy made in January 2015 are enclosed with this statement. The FHWC believes that the Global HRH Strategy should be the driving force behind coordinated financing, policy making, and implementation plans designed to strengthen health workforce around the world, especially for populations with the least access to properly trained and supported health workers.

## **Comments on WHA Agenda Item 16.1 2014 Ebola outbreak and follow-up to Special Session of the EB on Ebola**

The Ebola virus disease epidemic in West Africa has highlighted the urgent need for increased support for frontline health workers and the systems that support them in this region and around the world. WHO reported that as of May 6, 2015, 868 health workers have been infected with Ebola since the onset of the epidemic, and 507 of them have died caring for the 26,593 people confirmed or suspected to have been infected with the virus.

Nearly all of these lives have been lost in three countries – Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone –which have some of the lowest numbers of health workers per capita in the world. These three countries all had less than three doctors, nurses or midwives per every 10,000 people before the Ebola epidemic even took hold, far less than the 22.8 per 10,000 ratio WHO has stated is the minimum needed to deliver basic health services.

FHWC reiterates its recommendations made to the US government in November 2014 and its statement to the WHO Executive Board in January 2015, enclosed with this statement. In addition to the recommendations for a fervent push to address global gaps in access to properly trained and supported health workers articulated in our comments on WHA Agenda Item 14.2, FHWC urges the United States and other member states to support Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone in increasing support for local health workers on the frontlines of the Ebola fight, building a responsive and sustainable supply-chain management system, addressing stigma, and ensuring a sustainable frontline health workforce by supporting training programs.

Simply put, access to competent and supported health workers can no longer be allowed to languish as a global health policy afterthought. The heroic sacrifices of frontline health workers must be met with honor, compassion and support for their efforts. Investments must be made in equipment, supplies, training, effective management and financial support for the retention of health workers to ensure that every community has the workforce needed to save lives, and the robust systems required to support those workers in detecting, analyzing and responding to new and emerging public health threats like Ebola.