

## Change of leadership for WHO in 2003

Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General of WHO, has announced that she will not be standing for re-election after her five-year term ends in July 2003. In a letter to the secretariat on 23 August, she said she felt that WHO had made significant progress in her three main priority areas: putting health high on the international development agenda; mobilizing a new range of partners in support of health; and starting a process of change and reform in the Organization. Those objectives, she said, "go beyond the limits of any term", and WHO was well on track to attaining them and fulfilling the many demands being placed on it.

She concluded: "My decision to complete my work as Director-General at the end of my current term reflects the fact that I have had leading positions in political and public office for nearly 30 years, and would be 69 at the end of a second term. I will push ahead with our work every day that remains until July 2003, and I will continue to do everything I can to support the Organization and its noble cause in the future."

WHO's Executive Board nominates a candidate for the post in January 2003, and the World Health Assembly appoints the new incumbent in May, to take up office in July. The list of candidates is closed on November 17.

## WHO releases global reference guide on 325 essential medicines

The first edition of the WHO Model Formulary was released on 4 September. It provides comprehensive information on all 325 of the medicines on WHO's Model List of Essential Drugs. Recommended use, dosage, adverse effects, contraindications and warnings are given for each drug. The main aims of publishing this information are to increase patient safety, reduce waste in medical spending, and help to correct bad prescribing habits.

The new formulary provides a model for governments and institutions responsible for national formularies. It will meet an acute need especially in places where advertising is the only source of information on the drugs available to health workers, prescribers

and patients. As Hans Hogerzeil, from WHO's department of Essential Drugs and Medicines Policy, puts it: "Unfortunately, developing countries do not always have access to unbiased information about medicines. The formulary aims to address that problem and provide a service based solely on scientific evidence." Only about two-thirds of the populations in developing countries are thought to have some form of access to essential medicines, and a major barrier to access is lack of information.

The WHO Model List of Essential Medicines has been recently updated to include 12 essential antiretroviral medicines for the treatment of HIV/AIDS. The list is compiled and revised to focus pharmaceutical efforts on priority needs and the medicines best suited to meeting them effectively, safely and affordably. The vast majority of medicines on the list are well-established and well-known products which are off patent and available from many sources.

The Formulary is available at [www.who.int/medicines3](http://www.who.int/medicines3).

## European report shows growing inequities in wealth and health

*The European health report 2002* claims that "all the major determinants of health are linked to social and economic factors". The report was presented in Copenhagen on 16 September to the annual meeting of WHO's Regional Committee for Europe. Analysing data gathered during the last 10 years from the 51 Member States in the region, representing a population of 870 million, the report finds widening gaps between the haves and the have-nots.

Particularly striking are the figures for life expectancy and gross domestic product per head. On average, people in the newly independent states (NIS) of the former Soviet Union die 10 years younger than those in western European countries. Expectancy of years of healthy life is 56 years in the NIS, 70 years in western countries. In the central and eastern European countries and the NIS, those living on less than US\$ 4 a day now constitute 46% of the population. In western Europe 10% of the total population are estimated to live below the poverty line (i.e. on an income of less than half the median).

More about the report and the European Regional Committee can be found at [www.euro.who.int](http://www.euro.who.int).

## Million-kronor prize will help launch Healthy Environments for Children initiative

At the World Summit for Sustainable Development, WHO's Director-General, Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland, announced a new initiative called Healthy Environments for Children. Diplomats and heads of UN agencies and nongovernmental organizations expressed strong support for the initiative at a reception in Johannesburg on 1 September. Dr Brundtland said: "This global alliance will build on our extensive experience with multi-partner initiatives such as the polio eradication drive, Roll Back Malaria, Stop TB, and the Tobacco-Free Initiative. We are committed to driving it forward speedily. Immediately after the World Summit, we will firm up plans so that we can have activities up and running within six months, and agree on measurable targets with our alliance partners."

At the same gathering, Dr Brundtland received the Swedish City of Göteborg's International Environment Prize for 2002, for her "her visionary and innovative work during the 80s, which laid the foundation for all the pioneering work around Agenda 21." The prize is worth 1 million kronors — about US\$ 100 000. Dr Brundtland said she would donate the money to the new initiative, "to get the work off to a flying start".

Unhealthy environments were estimated by the *World Health Report 2000* to contribute to the deaths of 4.7 million children of under five years old. Anarchic industrialization, explosive urban expansion, lack of pollution control, unregulated waste-dumping, unsustainable consumption of natural resources, and unsafe use of chemicals are among the chief dangers. The most common causes of childhood death that result are respiratory infections, diarrhoea, malaria, and accidents. The new initiative is aimed at forming an alliance of donor and practitioner organizations to tackle problems of water and sanitation, air pollution, disease vectors, chemicals (especially pesticides and lead), and injuries. ■