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## World leaders call for urgent action on adolescent wellbeing

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Governments and health leaders across the world have published a rallying cry for urgent global action to improve adolescent wellbeing.

In an open letter published by *The BMJ* on 1 April, the leaders warn that 1.2 billion people aged 10-19 worldwide “are at risk of inheriting a world blighted by climate change and scarred by covid-19.” Among 30 signatories to the letter are the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn, and Child Health; the World Health Organization; the United Nations; youth led organisations; and government representatives in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe.

While adolescents have been spared the most severe direct effects of the pandemic, the letter argues that indirect effects on their wellbeing are devastating.

They highlight that even before covid-19 adolescents and young adults faced many challenges to their wellbeing, including social injustice and inequalities, inadequate mental health, and a crisis of connection to family, community, and society, with increasing numbers living on the streets or dropping out of school.

At the same time, development assistance for adolescent health accounted for only 1.6% of total development assistance for health between 2003 and 2015, despite a third of the total global burden of disease estimated to have roots in adolescence.

The leaders also highlight that many adolescents face unemployment or unstable employment when moving into young adulthood. In 2017, 34% of young women and 10% of young men aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education, or training, with more pronounced disparities in northern Africa and southern Asia.

Even among adolescents and young adults who are employed, an increasing proportion have poor job security, variable weekly earnings, and minimal or no health or social security coverage, they add. “These examples show that, as a global community, we have paid insufficient attention to the multidimensional and intersectional nature of adolescent wellbeing and the importance of the transition to young adulthood,” they write.

The leaders call for a new agreed definition and conceptual framework for adolescent wellbeing to inform policymaking. This should include good health and optimum nutrition; connectedness, positive values, and contribution to society; safety and a supportive environment; learning, competence, education, skills, and employability; and agency and resilience.

“We invite everyone—decision makers, policy makers, civil society, service providers, educators, donors, innovators, and, most importantly, adolescents themselves—to support this call to action,” they write. “Together, we can ensure that it results in concrete policies, integrated programmes, and sustained investments for adolescent wellbeing.”

“Adolescents, youth, and youth led organisations are at the heart of this initiative and will continue to be so. But we all have a part to play in achieving these goals if we are to deliver a more equitable and inclusive world for this and future generation,” they added.