

Advocating for a comprehensive approach to economic reimagination from a youth perspective

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In our dynamic world, reimagining our economy is vital for building resilient and inclusive societies that prioritize the well-being of all. This requires understanding the intricate relationship between economic structures, public health and social inequities, including those related to gender and health, while also adopting a Health in All Policies approach.

Health-care expenditure is on the rise, with the average Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) health expenditure to GDP ratio reaching 9.2% in 2022 (3). Among the notable challenges is the escalating cost associated with health innovation. Technology, in particular, plays a significant role in this expenditure surge (4), highlighting its substantial impact on spending patterns. This is further compounded by established factors such as disease prevalence or changes in demography as underlying factors fuelling increases in health-care spending, amplifying the financial burden on individuals and health systems, and exacerbating disparities. However, social inequity acts as a barrier to growth, corrodes trust and inflames political tensions, as stated by the International Monetary Fund (5). Consequently, adopting holistic approaches that seamlessly integrate economic and health considerations while addressing disparities among marginalized groups becomes imperative.

In the light of these intricacies, it is vital to arm the next generation with a nuanced comprehension of health dynamics among diverse populations. We must equip them with the skills to recognize and address disparities and that are essential for navigating the complexities of evolving health systems. This means fostering competencies in management and the discernment of inequities to ensure that our future leaders are well-prepared to navigate the ever-evolving terrain of health care.

Recognizing this, I spearheaded the first Health Management Congress in Portugal to bring together economics, law and health students, professionals and policy-makers (6). The objective was twofold: to introduce young minds to the intricacies of health planning and to provide a platform for cross-generational learning. By fostering early engagement, we aimed to equip future health-care leaders with a nuanced understanding of the challenges they will face, such as the role of rehabilitation and assistive technology in policy-making and the importance of investing in prevention in underserved areas. Participants gained insight into how the economy can favour the majority while overlooking the needs of the minority, and their role in preventing this disparity.

Moreover, it is essential to start addressing health and economic disparities at local level. In Portugal, Med on Tour is a renowned initiative in which medical students conduct screenings in remote villages and homes for elderly people, particularly those with mobility challenges (7). This hands-on approach not only delivers health care directly to underserved communities but also underscores the glaring disparities

in access within our country. It serves as a stark reminder that access to health care is not uniform for all and highlights the responsibility of privileged people to advocate for and enhance the lives of those lacking adequate resources. Community-centred strategies are vital and warrant consideration when redefining the goals of our health systems.

As we advocate for reimagining our economy, it is imperative to integrate health considerations into the broader discourse. A resilient society is one that recognizes the intrinsic link between economic structures and public health, actively addresses disparities, and ensures that progress benefits all. Education and awareness emerge as critical in bridging the gap between innovation-driven progress and equitable distribution of health care. By facilitating dialogue and collaboration between generations and showcasing the diverse relationships that communities have with health care, we empower young people to envision a more inclusive future in which health is a shared responsibility.

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¹ All references were accessed 7 March 2024.

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