

COMMONWEALTH HEALTH MINISTERS COMMIT TO TACKLING GLOBAL WORKFORCE CHALLENGES IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES

The 36TH Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting (CHMM) in Geneva on 24-25 May 2024 included a strong focus on the global challenges facing the health and social services workforce, alongside other commitments aiming to provide universal health coverage for all. COSW welcomes these commitments and was pleased to contribute to the ministerial dialogue.

COSW commits to working closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat, member states and accredited organisations on this crucial issue for the future of all peoples and welcomes the proposal to 'create a voluntary Commonwealth Community of Practice for the Health and Care Workforce to share experiences and actionable solutions'.



CHMM opening session, 25 May 2024

COSW welcomes the commitments (Paras 13, 37-41, 56) to 'work collectively to address the global and national shortfalls of health and care workers, in accordance with the WHO Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health: Workforce 2030', to 'prioritise the wellbeing of health and care workers and strive for gender equality while ensuring access to safe and decent working conditions, career pathways, work-life balance, and protected labour rights including parental leave', and to 'overcome on-going negative impacts of international health and care workforce migration, whilst maximising the positive benefits, including through alignment with the existing Global Code of Practice'. COSW will participate actively in the proposed Community of Practice (Para 57).



CHPA Chair, Vajira Dissanayake, presents recommendation from the 2024 CHPA Policy Forum

COSW contributed to the Ministerial break-out session on workforce challenges which resulted in recommendations noted in the CHMM communiqué.

The CHMM was addressed by the Director General of the World Health Organisation. Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus, identified the health and social service workforce crisis as his second priority: 'Let us therefore commit to protecting and investing in the health and care workforce, including in their education, their jobs and their decent work conditions', he said.

Other issues agreed by the CHMM of relevance to social workers include:

- multi-sectoral collaboration as key to effective health care and wellbeing (Para 14);
- urgent need for the health-sector to address the devastating impact of violence against women and girls (Para 11)
- increased burden of mental health conditions, especially among youth (Paras 21/2) – *COSW has contributed to Commonwealth webinars on mental health issues*;
- need for food security for all (Para 23);
- climate change impacts on health AND wellbeing (Para 24, 61);
- 2022 Kigali Declaration on Childcare and Protection Reform and the importance of delivering quality care for children and young people (Para 34) – *COSW is playing a key role through chairing Commonwealth Children's Interest Group (ComCIG)*;
- develop a roadmap on ageing well (Para 58);
- acknowledge the role of ... Commonwealth accredited organisations and young people in building health system resilience (Para 35);

"COSW successfully ensured that social work and social services remained visible in the discussions of health ministers", observed COSW Main Representative David N Jones after the meeting. "Too often social work is ignored or taken for granted. Partnerships between health, social work and other stakeholders provide essential foundations for overcoming the growing ill-health challenges and social problems affecting our world. Social workers have invaluable experience of the reality of communities which must be heard. **COSW is working tirelessly to ensure that the experience of social workers informs Commonwealth policy developments**", David Jones promised.



COSW Main Representative David N Jones and CHPA Chair Vajira Dissanayake
at Commonwealth meetings in Geneva

NOTE FOR EDITORS: COSW is an organisation for citizens of the Commonwealth who are interested in supporting social work and social development. It is supported by social work associations in the Commonwealth. It aims to promote and support communication and collaboration between social workers and social work associations of Commonwealth countries, and to uphold and promote the code of ethics of the International Federation of Social Workers. This statement can be found on the COSW website www.cosw.info/news

Commonwealth Health Ministers meet each year in Geneva in the wings of the World Health Assembly.

COSW Main Representative, David N Jones, has been a member of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Health which prepared the first draft of the Ministerial statement. COSW is also a member of the Commonwealth Health Professions and Partners Alliance which presented the outcome of the 2024 Policy Forum to the CHMM.

Full text of the CHMM - [Ministerial outcome statement](#).

Commonwealth Secretariat press release - [Health ministers pledge joint action to build climate-resilient health systems](#)

[WHO Director-General's keynote remarks](#) at the 36th Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting – 25 May 2024

[Commonwealth Civil Society Policy Forum](#) on health and wellbeing – YouTube video

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