

Celebrating Healthy Cities

By Charles Price

Each year on April 7, the World Health Organization (WHO) celebrates World Health Day to commemorate WHO's founding in 1948. This year WHO has chosen to recognize the importance of healthy cities. Our theme, "Healthy Cities for a Better Life," will be reflected throughout the year, with cities focusing on ways to improve access to health care, reduce pollution and crime, and bolster health education.

WHO has chosen this theme because of the dramatic growth of cities since the beginning of this century. Back in 1900, one person in 10 lived in a city. By 1948, the proportion was three in 10. And by the year 2000, over half of the world's population will be "urbanites." A second reason for this theme is the impact urban growth is having on the health of city dwellers. In developing countries, for example, more than 600 million urban dwellers are living in conditions that threaten their health.

Health promotion events will be held throughout April in nearly 1,000 cities. For example, Pcs, Hungary will institute an anti-tobacco campaign; Kaunas, Lithuania will sponsor an essay competition on visions for a healthy city and coordinate events with Earth Day; and Lodz, Poland will offer free mammography on all Sundays in April.

Cities are encouraged to organize health promotion events and publicize them in the media. For more information on World Health Day, contact Dr. Greg Goldstein, WHO's healthy city coordinator in Geneva, Switzerland. Address: 20, Avenue Appia, CH-1211, Geneva 27, Switzerland. Fax: 41 22 7914127. Phone: 41 22 7913559. E-mail: goldsteing@who.ch.
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