



**9th International Conference on
Birth Defects and Disabilities in the Developing World
23 – 26 February 2020
Colombo, Sri Lanka**

Colombo Declaration on Birth Defects Care and Prevention

***A Call to Accelerate Efforts towards Birth Defects Care and Prevention
to Achieve Health for All***

Birth defects affect approximately 8 million births annually and account for 11% of neonatal deaths and as much as 10% of stillbirths globally. More than 90% of these babies are in low-and middle-income countries. Among those who survive, many experience lifelong disability. Birth defects care and prevention make an important contribution to the health and well-being of individuals, families and the society at large. First, we must ensure that all birth defects are counted to determine the geographic variations in the prevalence of birth defects and the mortality associated with them to ensure allocation of resources to where they are most needed. Providing access to services aimed at birth defects care and prevention should be an important consideration for all governments across the world as they develop and implement plans to achieve Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030.

It has been a decade since the Sixty-third World Health Assembly passed a resolution on Birth Defects in 2010 [WHA63.17 Agenda item 11.7). Although we have come a long way in increasing awareness and promoting surveillance, much work remains. It is critical that stakeholders at all levels engage in reviewing the progress in implementation of the 2010 WHA resolution to help add momentum to birth defects care and prevention.

Close to 400 leading health care professionals, researchers and representatives from academic, research, government, international development and civil society organizations, from 36 countries deliberated on optimizing Birth Defects Care and Prevention at the *9th International Conference on Birth Defects and Disabilities in the Developing World* in Colombo, Sri Lanka from 23 to 26 February 2020.

Recognizing the need for advocacy for birth defects care and prevention, and in alignment with the Sixty-third World Health Assembly Resolution (2010) on Birth Defects, we, the

participants of the 9th International Conference on Birth Defects and Disabilities in the Developing World;

1. REQUEST the World Health Organization to:

- i. Revisit and review the progress in the implementation of the Sixty-third World Health Assembly Resolution WHA63.17 Agenda item 11.7 (2010)
- ii. Reinvigorate global efforts to prioritize birth defects prevention and care in the global health agenda

2. URGE World Health Organization, international development partners, governments, funders and the global community to dedicate support and resources to:

- i. establish systems for collection of quality data on birth defects through surveillance, newborn screening, and other evaluations and use the collected information for action
- ii. develop national policies and concerted programs for birth defects care and prevention and re-orientate healthcare and public health systems to implement those programs effectively, including policy, guidelines and monitoring for fortification of foods with folic acid and rubella vaccination
- iii. ensure that health care policy and practice for birth defects is based on current scientific evidence
- iv. implement policies and programs aimed at addressing maternal and newborn health in humanitarian settings
- v. provide programs and services for improving the health of women and girls before, during and after pregnancy, including those for reducing exposure to harmful and teratogenic substances, including alcohol, drugs and medications
- vi. make available screening and diagnostic services, including genetic testing for birth defects, along the life course
- vii. ensure medical and developmental therapies for individuals with birth defects are available to those who need them without experiencing financial hardship as part of universal healthcare coverage
- viii. provide access to treatment and care options, including timely surgical care and rehabilitation for individuals with birth defects and disabilities
- ix. ensure continuation of services from pediatric to adult life for individuals with birth defects
- x. promote life course approaches for care and prevention of birth defects, stillbirths and preterm birth into primary health care, with an emphasis on maternal and child health, by addressing risk factors related to lifestyle, infections, and nutrition to ensure access to optimal preconception and prenatal care

- xi. provide initial training and continuing education to healthcare workers at all levels to improve the quality of reproductive, maternal, newborn, adolescent and child health care services, including genetic and genomic education
- xii. encourage and support networking and partnerships for birth defects care, prevention, advocacy and research
- xiii. educate the public about opportunities to improve birth outcomes through effective use of traditional and social media modalities
- xiv. engage civil society and parent/patient organizations for birth defects care, prevention, and advocacy
- xv. implement programs to eliminate stigma and discrimination against persons with birth defects and disabilities
- xvi. reorient health & non-health service provider systems to implement concerted programs to optimize living status of persons with disabilities

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- *College of Community Physicians of Sri Lanka*
- *Health Informatics Society of Sri Lanka*
- *Perinatal Society of Sri Lanka*
- *Sri Lanka Association for Child Development*
- *Sri Lanka Association of Paediatric Surgeons*
- *Sri Lanka Heart Association*
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