

The Healthy Societies Dialogue at Wilton Park



August 2022

Contents

Page 3 - Introduction

Page 6 - Key themes and recommendations:

-Diverse solutions for achieving healthier societies

- Applying a political economy lens
- Collaborating across sectors
- Driving multi-sectoral and participatory governance from the local to the global level
- Realising equity and equality
- Nurturing community participation and ownership
- Generating useful evidence

Page 10 - Key take aways from the Healthy Societies Dialogue

Page 12 - Diverse regional perspectives on healthy societies

Page 14 - Striving for Better Societies: A Case Study from Brazil

Page 15 - Next Steps in Co-creating Healthy Societies



Introduction



While people in many countries are living longer, they are not necessarily leading healthier lives. Changes in societies have contributed to improved health but have also caused many challenges and risks to people's health and well-being. In 2020, the global COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe causing untold damage to societies and economies in only a matter of weeks and setting back progress towards achieving sustainable development goals, health, and wellbeing.

Prior to the pandemic, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had set out a target of improving the health and well-being of one billion people around the globe by 2023. How can this be achieved and sustained? Incremental change will not be enough. There is a need for a crucial transformation towards safer, greener, healthier and more equitable societies. Yet, the pathways to achieve this goal, from the local to the global level, remained unclear.

A series of dialogues between February 2020 and June 2022 provided space for different groups and individuals across the world to come together and explore what is required to achieve healthy societies, and to stimulate a community of practice to initiate, amplify and accelerate action.

The Healthy Societies dialogues at Wilton Park convened diverse voices consisting of leaders and experts from a wide range of organisations, disciplines, interests, levels, and regions. Over 165 participants (of whom 49% were women, 47% male and 4% undisclosed) from nearly 50 countries contributed experiences, ideas, and suggestions to make collective progress towards a world where populations can flourish in healthy societies. The meetings were facilitated by Wilton Park, in partnership with the Government of Sweden, and WHO's Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research. This report summarises the 2.5-year process and the discussions that took place over this time.

Diverse pathways to achieving healthy societies, from cross-sectoral collaboration to local ownership

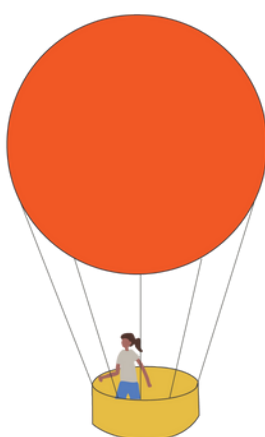
The transformation towards healthy societies requires a radical shift in how we, all act together in society, whether in the public or private sector, as state, civil society or citizen. To accelerate and amplify positive action, the following levers were identified across the series:

- **Collaborating across sectors:** No single sector, discipline, stakeholder, community, or country has the solution. Collaboration from a diverse range of actors from all sectors and levels will aid in achieving healthy societies.
- **Checking power balances and ensuring accountability:** Imbalances in the relationship between state, market, and society present major barriers to addressing inequities. Ensuring accountability, transparency and responsiveness enables an understanding of these dynamics and can help overcome inequities.
- **Driving multi-sectoral and participatory governance from the local to the global level:** To achieve healthy societies, multi-sector governance is required. Governance platforms for building multi-sectoral dialogues and alliances are needed. Leadership is crucial at all levels: locally, nationally, regionally and globally, and across all segments of society, including citizens, public and private sectors.
- **Realising equity and equality:** Addressing power imbalances and removing barriers to the participation of women, youth, and under-represented groups in decision-making are critical. The structural causes of inequities and inequalities can only be address through transformative policies.
- **Nurturing community participation and ownership:** National communities should be at the centre of developing and sustaining healthy societies. Local and regional policies matter most to populations where local level offering have many entry points for action by engaging communities, citizens, and activists. Through new forms of engagement that digital transformation enables and place-based approaches, citizen participation and ownership can be nurtured.
- **Generating useful evidence:** Research can be a powerful tool for action. Collaboration between researchers and policy makers can ensure alignment for the healthy societies agenda. Inclusive and co-produced multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral research agendas are needed to identify the most impactful approaches, how these can be delivered and the co-benefits of investments in healthy societies.

As the Healthy Societies dialogues conclude, the diverse voices convened at Wilton Park formed an informal network that will continue to evolve organically and remain committed to moving the healthier societies vision forward. As no specific sector, group, nor region holds the key to unlocking the gains of healthier societies, the organic network encourages actors across sectors and fields to engage in the network and bring their own unique expertise to the table.

Healthy Societies holds the potential to realising several co-benefits across areas such as health, food and climate. Following the Wilton Park Dialogues, the informal network will focus on visualising and realising the co-benefits of Healthy Societies by inviting for co-creation across sectors, incentivising and enabling action and seize and nurture any opportunities arising to unlock healthy societies.

Detailed reports from each of the dialogues are available [here](#).



Key Themes and Recommendations



A range of themes emerged across the dialogues with varying perspectives. Discussions focused on current threats to healthier lives, such as declining planetary health, persistent inequities, and ailing democracies. Healthy societies were identified as key to overcoming these issues where conversations focused on how to achieve healthier societies and realise healthier lives. Political economy, cross-sectoral collaboration, governance and accountability, equity and equality, community participation and ownership, topped with research & evidence, were among the central levers discussed. A summary of decisive perspectives and recommendations for each of these domains to promote healthy societies feature in the following chapter.

● **Rising health inequities, poor planetary health, and ailing democracies prevent healthier societies**

The general advances in health and increase in wealth do not spread equally on the global or local levels. The COVID-19 pandemic has derailed many decades of progress in health and development. It has also exacerbated social, economic, political and health inequities everywhere. Besides persistent inequities, deteriorating planetary health is threatening healthier lives. The health of people and the planet are inextricably linked. Many people are suffering from the effects of climate change, poor air quality, lack of food or unavailability of healthy food options. In the political sphere, action to enable healthier societies would be needed, but is hampered by ailing democracies suffering from declining trust in elites, cultural, social, and economic divides.

● **Diverse solutions for achieving healthier societies**

Considering the cascading threats to healthier lives, identifying concrete pathways to achieving healthy societies is crucial and was the core subject matter of the Wilton Park dialogues. Among the central solutions discussed were applying a political economy lens, collaborating across sectors, driving multi-sectoral and participatory governance from the local to the global level, realising equity and equality, nurturing community participation & ownership and generating evidence. The following sections summarise the key points and recommendations for each of the central pathways toward healthier societies discussed across the series.

● **Checking power balances and ensuring accountability**

Across the world, unequal distribution of wealth and resources are driving health impacts and inequities. The health sector has not paid enough attention to the importance of governance processes, yet it is a major determinant for how healthy societies can be achieved. Imbalances in the relationships between state, market, and society present considerable barriers to addressing

inequities and ensuring accountability, transparency and responsiveness enables an understanding of these dynamics. It is paramount to explore what blend of rights, state, and market produce the best outcomes for healthy societies.

Recommendations:

- Invest in governance processes research and apply political economy analysis to identify the barriers to creating and sustaining equitable healthy societies.
- Link to existing political economy discussions and identify how to convene around common themes and goals to shape and drive the healthy societies agenda.
- Articulate the opportunity and political narrative for change and find the entry points that the COVID-19 pandemic offers.

● **Collaborating across sectors**

Improving health and building healthy societies requires ambitious and coordinated action across a variety of sectors and actors. No single sector, organisation or group can shape or implement the healthy societies agenda alone. There is a need for cross-sectoral action and to develop platforms for sharing knowledge, ideas, and resources across local and global networks. Leaders need to steer multi-sectoral processes and engage communities and civil society through bottom-up approaches. Including the right people, groups, and organisations in co-creating healthy societies mean involving: a range of sectors across government; voices from all global regions; young people; indigenous people; social movements; civil society; private sector; universities and research institutions; faith leaders; key public proponents; UN agencies and other global institutions.

Recommendations:

- Build and support cross-sectoral platforms and networks to overcome siloed ways of working, share ideas and experiences and coordinate collective action.
- Facilitate the participation of a range of actors, from all sectors and levels to co-create healthy societies.

● **Driving multi-sectoral and participatory governance from the local to the global level**

Multi-sector governance for healthy societies is required but represents a challenge, as sectors are fragmented. Healthy societies urgently need to be promoted beyond the health sector, for example, in education, climate, finance, food, and urban planning. Although health is not a primary concern for other sectors, there are vast co-benefits associated with positive health outcomes. A shared global and national agenda must be created with policies, approaches and investments which aim to transform structural inequalities and power dynamics. While multilateralism is much needed, it is not enough. Countries must be at the centre of efforts because national policies directly affect populations and health outcomes. A compelling framework for public

accountability is required. Democratic participation is also a crucial driver of healthy societies, and community dialogue and engagement are required to identify needs and solutions. The local and sub-national levels have a fundamental role to play in engaging citizens and communities.

Recommendations:

- Develop governance platforms enabling multi-sectoral alliances to address the determinants of health within planetary boundaries.
- Engage new local and national political actors and movements beyond the traditional trade unions and political parties.
- Facilitate democratic citizen participation and engage with social movements to drive bottom-up demand for healthier societies.
- Support the development of effective frameworks for public accountability to create healthy societies.

● **Realising equity & equality**

Equity and equality are central to achieving healthy societies and have reason to be at the heart of all approaches and interventions. Transformative policy proposals must address the whole range of health determinants, tackle inequities and inequalities and make real progress towards healthy societies. Addressing power imbalances, inequities, and inequalities is a socio-political challenge and is inherently affected by approaches used to promote health, including how knowledge is generated and used. A more nuanced and critical perspective is necessary since most well-intentioned policies and laws do not tackle fundamental obstacles to create healthy societies for all.

Recommendations:

- Seize the opportunity to promote equity in the healthy societies agenda.
- Support the creation of transformative policies that address the structural causes of inequities and inequalities, including gender.
- Engage communities, women, youth and under-represented groups to ensure their participation in decision-making and effective accountability mechanisms.

● **Nurturing community participation & ownership**

The entry points for action on healthy societies should be at the local level engaging communities, citizens, and activists. Underrepresented voices need to be amplified to develop an inclusive narrative reflecting diverse realities. This can nurture ownership for healthier societies and drive bottom-up demand. Place-based approaches have shown to be useful for reaching a convergence of perspectives and sharing knowledge among different stakeholders, actors and sectors developing upon existing practice.

Recommendations:

- Support the creation and strengthening of platforms for local dialogue with actors from a variety of perspectives, including communities and policy makers.
- Support community-led activities and social movements that promote healthy societies.
- Apply place-based approaches to engage multiple stakeholders and reach a common ground.

● **Generating useful evidence**

Research can be a powerful tool for action when research objectives align with policy priorities. Collaboration between researchers and policy makers can ensure alignment for the healthy societies agenda. Across communities, societies, nations and transnational groups, there are different ideas for achieving healthy societies and a critical perspective on narratives, research agendas, knowledge producers and institutional processes is needed. Inclusive and co-produced multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral research agendas need to be implemented with the goal of identifying the costs and co-benefits for other sectors when investing in healthy societies.

Recommendations:

- Expand the healthy societies research community to include people outside the health sector and communities themselves and consider different types of knowledge.
- Develop a common language and research agenda that reflects the diversity of perspectives and geographies.
- Work with social scientists to communicate results and identify a road map on how research efforts can promote a healthy societies policy agenda.

Key Take Aways from the Healthy Societies Dialogues

February 2020

The initial dialogue set out to explore the levers for achieving healthy societies and to stimulate communities to take this work forward. The group explored the social, economic, and environmental determinants of healthy societies, the promotion of cross-sectoral approaches for better health and the prioritisation of health in other sectoral policies and settings. Identifying how to drive transformation to healthy societies requires a radical shift in how we all act together in the private sector, public sector, civil society or as state or citizen. Since many determinants of healthy societies lie beyond the health system, the health sector must establish working relationships across professional and sectoral boundaries. Leadership is crucial at all levels to undertake cross-sectoral action for healthier societies.



April 2021

New voices joined the conversation as the group reconvened to discuss the creation of equitable healthy societies within the context of COVID-19 and the pandemic recovery. It was highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic derailed many decades of progress in health and development and brought into clear view the inequities running across ethnic, gender, and wealth divides. The pandemic has drawn attention to the interconnectedness between health and environment, and a need for ‘whole of society’ policy approaches. The key is understanding how to seize this moment to reimagine how to build equitable healthy societies, while supporting a green economic recovery, addressing SDGs on climate and the environment, and upholding the Paris Agreement on climate change.



June 2021

Regional workshops across Africa, Latin America & Caribbean, Asia Pacific, and Europe & North America explored the plurality of ideas, visions, and narratives for healthy societies and identified key areas of convergence and divergence. Across regions, it was found that there is a need for a paradigm shift and fresh narrative to inform social thinking, public policy, and financing systems away from bio-medical approaches to health. Recognising and accounting for the importance of local context and cultural specificity is critical. A focus on equity and equality is fundamental to achieving healthy societies. Another subject of discussion was the deep link between planetary health and healthy societies, which spans across climate, biodiversity, food systems, poverty, and inequity. Democratic participation, including community dialogue, youth inclusion and civil society activism were identified to be crucial for driving bottom-up demand and accountability for healthy societies.

November 2021

The group took stock of the discussion so far and outlined the next steps in developing a programme of work and nurturing communities to take this forward. It was agreed that the healthy society agenda needs to engage with politics at national levels and elevate diverse lived experiences and realities. Leading political actors, heads of governments and mayors provide excellent opportunities to champion the healthy societies agenda. Accelerating and amplifying existing efforts to create healthy societies and learning from action, for example through people-focused and bottom-up approaches, are also critical to advancing this agenda.

June 2022

The final dialogue, a hybrid virtual and in-person dialogue at Wiston House, identified key action areas for taking the work forward and accelerating action towards healthy societies. It was agreed that multi-sectoral action is needed to realize healthy societies and that it is crucial to frame healthy societies around notions of social justice, transformation, equity, wellbeing, and co-benefits. As a range of systems continue to undermine the health of populations, better monitoring and metrics of healthy societies and better ways to use evidence to hold powerful actors accountable are urgently required. Communities, women, and youth should be supported to play a key role in participation and effective accountability mechanisms.



Diverse Regional Perspectives on Healthy Societies



Visions to achieve healthy societies differ across geographies and communities as do the local realities, resources, political scopes, and windows of opportunity for action to pursue these visions. The series convened voices from nearly 50 countries to explore the plurality of ideas and consider the common principles that underpin the vision and narratives for healthy societies. Below is a snapshot of the regional perspectives voiced at the dialogues across Africa, Asia Pacific, Europe and North America, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Africa

Young people comprise much of the African population for whom equity is a central goal. Action spheres include transforming economic and material systems such as food and production systems to realise people's role as producers and creators of wealth. Hence, political economy analysis can be a helpful tool to support action for healthy societies in Africa. Reforms in the education system and curricula are needed to adapt to local conditions and reach a less bio-medical understanding of health. The African pathway to healthy societies might include addressing the over-medicalisation of health, tracking financial flows to redistribute wealth back to young people and promoting community engagement and drivers, so citizens and communities can become co-producers of health.

“We won't create health and wellbeing if we don't look at what is happening to the wealth of our continent“.

Wilton Park Africa regional dialogue participant

Asia Pacific

In Asia-Pacific, the power over society's economic and productive elements currently concentrates in the private sector. To tackle power imbalances, a holistic approach from government and society is needed. Governance processes must become more responsive, participatory, and accountable and create cross-sectoral collaboration platforms. To achieve healthier societies in Asia Pacific, evidence-based tools need to be applied to understand the impacts of long-term investments in healthy societies from one generation to the next. Monitoring financial flows can support reforms in regulations and taxes. At the sub-national level, communities and local leaders can play a major role in promoting healthy societies.

“Is a healthy society compatible with the levels of inequality we are witnessing in the region?”

Wilton Park Asia Pacific regional dialogue participant

Europe and North America

In Europe and North America, gaps exist in domestic policies and action to address the structural causes of inequities, for example through redistributive policies. To develop a healthy societies narrative and engage with multi-sector actors and broader social movements, it is critical to define goals and values with a nuanced understanding of equity and organise political activity around this. The pathway towards healthier societies in Europe and North America might involve not only a refined narrative around equity and equality but also require engaging with social movements to harness the power of bottom-up change and improve accountability for healthy societies. In addition, it will be fundamental to building multi-sectoral governance platforms.

“What we absolutely need is bottom-up movement to push legal norms and the actions of companies and states.”

Wilton Park Europe and North America regional dialogue participant

Latin America and Caribbean

Transforming social protection systems and increasing state capacities, policies and public subsidies are key to achieving healthier societies in Latin America and the Caribbean. Joining forces with existing social movements that share goals and potential co-benefits and supporting youth as key drivers of social movements is crucial. A political economy analysis to identify inequities and key drivers can enable action for building equitable healthy societies. For this, investments in research are needed.

“Movements outside of health are creating a healthier planet.”

Wilton Park Latin America and Caribbean regional dialogue participant

Striving for Better Societies: A Case Study from Brazil



A mayor with a vision to create happier and healthier citizens

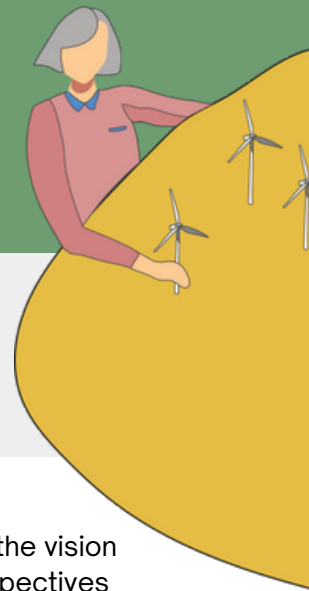
In the Brazilian town of Boa Vista, Mayor Teresa Surita reorganised her administration and took brave decisions for a better future for citizens and a healthy society. Boa Vista is the smallest, poorest state capital in Brazil with a population of 400,000 people, 66% of whom live in poverty. In 2013, when Teresa Surita was elected as Mayor of Boa Vista, the city's situation was critical. There were only 232 ill-equipped police for the security of 325,000 people. Street lighting was limited, the city flooded seriously for five months of every year, public spaces were neglected and there were no parks or recreation areas. There was no internet or technology, all 15 city departments worked in isolation, schools were ill equipped, teachers were in short supply and there was almost no early childhood provision. Most critical was health; just one children's hospital and seven ill-equipped, under-staffed health clinics.

How multi-sectoral collaboration transformed a whole city

Mayor Teresa Surita did two main things to change this: she built a fantastic team and used a multi-sectoral approach. All departments began doing integrated, inter-departmental work from a unified, prioritised plan. They learnt the power and importance of working together, and saw their departments as part of a whole, which were complementary to each other. Today Boa Vista has 25 new schools and has renovated 89 schools. It has 8 new daycare centres and 34 health centres, and the children's hospital has been renovated and extended with 91 extra beds. It now serves the whole state, indigenous communes, and Venezuelan refugees. There is a new police compound with double the number of police officers. Fifteen departments worked together to achieve this.

Boa Vista is the only city in the Amazon to invest in solar energy and by December 2020, all municipal buildings were solar powered with Internet and a multi-sectoral information platform. There has been heavy investment in drainage and flood defences and there are now 60 kilometres of cycle network in the city. Five departments worked together to achieve this. Today, Boa Vista is a clean, green, family-friendly space with 52 new or renovated squares and parks and gardens with playgrounds, sports equipment and areas for children and adults. The city is well lit with free Internet in public spaces. Six departments worked together to achieve this. Boa Vistans are happier, healthier and have a better quality of life. Every mayor has the power to change their city.

Next Steps in Co-creating Healthy Societies



As the Healthy Societies dialogues at Wilton Park conclude, the conversations around the vision for healthier societies continue to unfold in various shapes and forms. The diverse perspectives and recommendations summarised in this report can be a useful tool to guide further dialogue and action. In terms of following steps, this page provides an overview of actions that actors across different fields can take to advance towards healthier societies.

How to take action for healthy societies

To achieve healthy societies, commitment and measures will be needed across different fields and spheres of action. As a first step, the diverse group of experts convened at Wilton Park formed an informal network that will continue to evolve organically and commit to moving the healthier societies vision forward. This network of thought leaders, practitioners, innovators, and organisations will stay connected as a community of knowledge sharing and to coordinate activities to realise the healthy societies vision.

As no specific sector, group, nor region holds the key to unlocking the gains of healthier societies, the organic network encourages actors across sectors and fields to engage in the network and bring their own unique expertise to the table.

The informal network will focus their efforts on the below activities with the ambition to generate evidence, reaching new partners and accelerating action towards healthy societies:

1 Visualise and realise the health co-benefits

To realise healthy societies, the vision and co-benefits of taking this approach must be demonstrated. The experience coming from various innovative practices shows that change not only is possible, but feasible and in our common interest. Next steps will be to share this knowledge and make it widely available.

Healthy societies will finalise a healthy societies narrative that articulates the political and health benefits to lead to tangible action and release a one-pager that will facilitate far-reaching dissemination and presentation of the healthy societies approach at pertinent events.

2 Co-create across sectors

To co-create across sectors, visionary and nourishing leadership is required in the state, public and private sectors. Next steps will be to facilitate cooperation and collaboration between sectors and actors to amplify messages and frame opportunities to act.

Healthy Societies will do this by advancing knowledge on the healthy societies approach and reaching out across sectors to provide ideas, making offers to help. i.e., exploring the Climate-Food intersection by ascertaining how the community of healthy society partners can be helpful to amplify and accelerate the health outcomes.

3 Incentivise and enable action

To incentivise and enable action, messages that are communicated in ways that are relevant to people's lives must be ensured. Next steps will be to frame the goals, principles and evidence for healthy societies by listening to the people and communities involved.

Healthy Societies will launch a BMJ Series to communicate these principles and have them acknowledged, alongside a policy mixed methods review, and a systematic literature review to unearth existing concepts and identify both critical factors to achieve healthy societies and its possible shortcomings.

4 Seize and nurture opportunities

The strengthening of relationships, networks, practice, and monitoring must be sustained and nurtured. To succeed, it will be key to seize and nurture opportunities by taking advantage of situations that arise in political windows or shocks.

Healthy Societies will broaden the commitment and facilitate access by organically continuing to grow and encourage collaboration with actors interested in engaging with the healthy societies approach.

There are several initiatives focused on promoting healthier societies such as:

[McKinsey Health Institute](#)

[Institute of Health Equity](#)

[Pathfinder Initiative](#)

[P3-D Commission](#)

[Planetary Health Alliance](#)

[C40 Cities](#)

