

PHASA President: Julia Moorman

Date: 7 October 2015

**Venue: Moses Mabhida Stadium, Durban at The PHASA Conference
Opening Ceremony, in the evening**

Welcome Address for PHASA Conference 2015.

On behalf of the Public Health Association of South Africa (PHASA) executive I wish to extend a warm welcome to all the delegates to this year's PHASA Conference 2015 in Durban. This is our 11th national conference since PHASA was established.

The theme of the conference this year is Health and Sustainable Development: the future.

We chose this theme to coincide with the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in the past couple of weeks.

As you know, there are 17 SDG's and 169 targets are characterised under the five P's – people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

There is only one health specific goal - Goal 3 is Health and Wellbeing for all at all ages. This goal, and the targets that are set for health and wellbeing challenge us, the public health community, to action.

Although under that goal there are nine targets and four “means of implementation.” concerns have been raised that health, unlike in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's), has not taken centre stage.

Although factors that clearly affect health – water, sanitation, poverty and gender equality - are all targets in other goals there are concerns that health's lower profile will mean less national commitment.

We are challenged therefore to develop an agenda: public health in South Africa, an agenda that puts the physical and mental wellbeing of all South Africans at its heart. We need to strive to strike a balance between being visionary and we need to identify what we should do in the short to medium term to make an immediate and positive impact on people's health and identify what we should do in the future about longer term challenges that require a more sustained approach.

The second challenge for the public health community is to work to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC), central to achieving that SDG's. Dr Margaret Chan stated in 2012 that universal coverage was the most powerful concept that public health has to offer.

So we need to work towards universal health coverage at every stage of life. We need to emphasise primary health care and ensure that all South Africans receive quality health services without suffering financial hardship. We need to work to create a health care system that works for everyone and produces positive health outcomes. The National Development Plan (NDP) states that this is not out of reach by 2030.

Although a focus on universal health care is imperative we do also however need to ensure that UHC is not an end in itself but a mean to achieving health and well-being. Alone, UHC will not ensure population health and this poses a third challenge to the public health community. To strike the right balance between individual level curative services and population level health promotion and preventive measures.

We know that achieving the SDG's will require unprecedented inter - sectoral and intra governmental engagement and that ensuring the commitment to health of non-health departments and the private commercial sector will require strong and effective leadership. The document on the SDG propose mechanisms for the multi-sectoral strategies that will be needed to address well-being.

Our challenge, I believe, is to put in place clear mechanisms to engage other sectors that will ensure that we work together to create enabling social and environmental conditions that promote the health of the population and help individuals make healthy and sustainable decisions related to their daily living. Ensuring health in all policies is imperative. Public health practitioners must focus on more and better collaboration with sectors that influence health and illness outcomes. We need to develop a common agenda, negotiate and adopt shared goals and work towards common results. We need to work especially hard to engage the private commercial sector who do stand to gain profits from promoting

the determinants of ill health and for them to accept their responsibilities to safeguard and promote the health of communities.

One of our challenges is to ensure that there are clear mechanisms to report on progress towards achieving the SDG's. We need to ensure the monitoring of progress towards the SDGs using robust health indicators. Health is critical for sustainable development but it is also an important outcome of sustainable development and this therefore a good measure of the progress of government towards sustainable development.

Finally, I think we have a challenge to ensure that we have a robust public health workforce to take all of this forward – and most importantly to have a workforce who knows how to advocate and work across sectors and engage communities.

At the 14th World Congress in Kolkata India in February of this year, delegates from 70 countries issued a call to action. The delegates declared *“the time for study is past for the vast majority of the social, economic and environmental killers that stalk human kind. The time for action has arrived. As public health experts from all corners of the globe, we declare that the evidence is clear. We know what needs to be done.”* Urgent change is needed in public health policy and practice for the wellbeing of people.

In an article by Kent Buse and Sarah Hawkes from the WHO, they state that “the SDG’s are an opportunity to re-imagine health and its centrality to sustainable development. This is now the time to offer a credible game plan on how to deliver health and wellbeing so as to advance human dignity, equity and sustained wellbeing. “

So I hope that at this meeting we strengthen the profession of public health, share the latest research and information, promote best practices and advocate for public health issues and policies grounded in research and we too can re-imagine health.

Before I finish I wish to thank a few people for all their hard work and commitment. This has been my first year as President of PHASA so with them this conference would not have been possible. The Scientific Committee was chaired by Saiendhra Moodley and I would like to thank him for putting this excellent scientific programme together. The organising committee was chaired by Lihle Dungwane and I would like to thank her and her team. I would also very much like to thank and acknowledge Mandy Salomo and her team from the Medical Research Council (MRC)

Most of all thank you to all the delegates and now new PHASA members for registering and attending this conference, without you PHASA would be meaningless.

Finally, it is a great honour to be here in the Moses Mabhida Stadium so I wish to thank the Mayor of EThekweni for hosting us here tonight.