

**Adolescent and youth wellbeing in the Arab region: Challenges and promises of the second decade of life**

A partnership for and with youth

*The Arab regional Launch of the Report of the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing  
and a regional conference on adolescents and youth*Co-organizers:

The American University of Beirut Faculty of Health Sciences

The Arab Coalition for Adolescent Medicine

Background

Adolescence is a stage of human growth and development that falls in between childhood and adulthood (WHO, 2016). This particularly sensitive age group requires special attention as adolescents undergo a critical period of transition that affects their health and well-being (WHO, 2016). In addition to physical changes, key developmental experiences occur in young adults' lives where they undergo mental and emotional maturation that include gaining independence, discovering their identity, and acquiring various life-related skills and values (WHO, 2016). On the other hand, the period of adolescence poses a threat to adolescent's health and development whereby they are at a greater risk of engaging in health-compromising social behaviors such as smoking, drinking alcohol, substance use, violence and following an unhealthy diet (WHO, 2016). Prioritizing the health needs of this age group is critical to ensure healthy development and thriving. It is imperative to give attention to the needs of adolescents and unravel the social, economic and political determinants that influence their health, both positively and negatively.

The health and well-being of adolescents has been gaining increased attention over the past few years by public health professionals worldwide (WHO, 2014). The Lancet has published two issues on adolescent health, in 2009 and 2012. WHO released 'Health for The World's Adolescents' in 2014, which was followed by a call by the World Health Assembly to develop a Global Framework for Accelerated Action for Adolescent Health which 'will provide guidance to countries and programmes on how to plan, implement and monitor a survive, thrive, and transform' response to the health needs of adolescents. Most recently, the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing released its report highlighting the opportunities and challenges of investing in the second decade of life. The launch of the report took place in London in May 2016. Subsequent launches have taken place in North America, and in Africa. The Lancet Youth webpage <http://adolescentsourfuture.com/> ensures continued momentum of these efforts. These initiatives and reports have both documented health status, risk factors, and determinants of adolescent health, as well as identified key interventions within and outside the health system to promote the health of adolescents. All these documents point to the critical importance of active and meaningful participation of adolescents in the definition of issues that affect them, and in the crafting of solutions. Indeed adolescents are key assets to their own and their communities' wellbeing. Acknowledging the critical importance on young people for the wellbeing of the planet, the recently released Sustainable Development Goals highlighting the critical role of young people in achieving the goals.

This global health agenda has expanded internationally, including to the Arab region. The UN interagency on United Nations Inter-Agency Technical Task Team on Young People (UN IATTTYP) has recently released a 'Regional Framework on Young People 2016 – 2017 for the Arab States / Middle East and North Africa Region.' UNICEF MENARO in partnership with the Center for Public Health Practice at FHS/AUB released the 'Good Practices in Adolescent Programming' in 2016. The UNDP Arab Human Development Report 2016 focuses on youth.

In our region, young persons have been and continue to be exposed to structural state based violence as well as conflict and war that affect every aspect of their lives. Almost every country of the region has been affected by war or conflict over the last two decades. This exacerbates the uncertainties of an already tumultuous life stage for young people. This context is the backdrop against which we understand and respond. Youth in the region have used their voices constructively to craft hopeful future and push for equity and justice.

The time is right for a regional conference on young persons that consolidates global and regional evidence on the health of adolescents and programs that work to enhance their wellbeing. The conference - **Adolescent and youth wellbeing in the Arab region: Challenges and promises of the second decade of life**; A partnership for and with youth - is co-organized by the Faculty of Health Sciences at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon and the Arab Coalition for Adolescent Medicine. Established in 1954, the Faculty of Health Sciences is the first school of public health in the region, and hosts the only CEPH accredited Graduate Public Health Program. Adolescent and youth health has been a central theme in research and practice programs of FHS. In 2014, the Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH) sponsored a workshop entitled Youth Health in the Arab world. In 2015 - building on recent interventions which have highlighted the role of technology in engaging youth - CRPH in partnerships with the Center for Public Health Practice (CPHP) sponsored a workshop around Digital Solutions in Public Health. One of the key foci were digital innovations in adolescent health that were developed by youth, as well as deliberations over the potential for youth panel surveys in the region. In 2016, CPHP in partnerships with UNICEF MENARO published Good Practices in Adolescent Programming, - a regional report that highlighted scalable best practices in the areas of Health, Civic Engagement, Skills Building, Resilience and others. In addition, research programs at FHS have advanced evidence and practice on youth protective factors, mental health, sexuality, alcohol and tobacco use, and nutrition.

The Arab Coalition for Adolescent Medicine (ACAM) was established two years ago to guide efforts in Adolescent Medicine in our region. This conference is co-sponsored with the ACAM. With representation from nearly all countries in the region, the ACAM aims to identify pressing needs for young people through research and other scholarly work. Through this evidence, the ACAM advocates for and guides governments, policy makers, and institutions in establishing the necessary services and programs to promote the health and wellbeing of adolescents and youth.

The purpose of this conference is to launch the report of the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing in the Arab region, as well as build on and move forward global and regional initiatives to assess and promote adolescent health. The conference approaches youth as positive forces in their communities, and considers their wellbeing to be linked to a constellation of factors within and beyond the health sector. It aims to highlight the potential and promise of young people and to engage them effectively in discussions of their realities, hopes and mechanisms to enable their wellbeing and thriving. More specifically the conference objectives include:

- Communicate the most recent scholarship/evidence around adolescent and youth health globally and in the Arab world
- Provide a platform for critical dialogue around youth issues globally and in the Arab world
- Share findings around what works to promote youth wellbeing globally and in the Arab world
- Deliberate over next steps in research, and how it might contribute to practice and policy for youth wellbeing

Intended audience:

This conference will bring together experts in youth wellbeing from the region and globally. Participants will include academics, youth, representatives of government agencies, NGOs, WHO, UN, INGOs, among others.

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### AGENDA

Supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada

December 13

### Launch of the report of the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing (in coordination with the Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing)

<i>Time</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Speaker</i>
9:00-9:30	Welcome remarks	Iman Nuwayhid (AUB) Rima Afifi (AUB) Mamdouh Wahba (ACAM)
9:30-9:50	Overview of the Commission report and key messages	George Patton (University of Melbourne)
9:50-10:10	Adolescent and youth health in the Arab world: What data do we have, what data is missing, what are core indicators for adolescent health?	Ali Mokdad (IHME)
10:15-10:45	<i>Open Discussion</i>	
10:45-11:15	BREAK	
11:15-12:15	Youth perspectives on adolescent and youth health and wellbeing in the region And Q&A	<i>Moderator: Anthony Ghorayeb</i> 1. Assem Khamis (Egypt) 2. Mohammad Diaa Eddin Alaswad (Syria) 3. Abdullah Moussawi (Iraq) 4. Ahmed Shanah (Jordan) 5. Walaa Kayyal (Palestinian living in Lebanon) 6. Yousra Mesmi (Algeria)
12:15-1:15	Is the second decade another opportunity to enhance wellbeing? Brain development, enabling systems, and legal frameworks And Q&A	<i>Moderator: Marta Petagna</i> Lisa Knoll (UCL) Rima Afifi (AUB) Mitra Tauk (AUB)
1:15-2:00	LUNCH	
2:00-3:00	Interventions to promote adolescent and youth health and wellbeing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interventions within the health system</li> <li>• Interventions outside the health system</li> <li>• Q&amp;A</li> </ul>	<i>Moderator: Martine Najem</i>  Susan Sawyer (University of Melbourne) Beatrice Khater (AUB) Judith Diers (UNICEF NY)
3:00-4:00	Story-telling: Conditions, interventions, and health care services with/for adolescents and youth in contexts of war, conflict, and uncertainty Q&A	<i>Moderator: Sawsan Abdulrahim</i> Rabih Chammai (Lebanon MOPH) Hala Kerbage (Lebanon) Bouchra Adi (Syria) Lucienne Nader (Lebanon)
4:00-4:30	Youth response to the Lancet Commission report on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing	<i>Moderator: Hala Alaouie</i> <i>Two young people</i>
4:30-5:30	Where to from here? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting adolescent health at the regional/local level and the Global AAHA</li> <li>• The Regional UN IATTTYP Strategy</li> </ul> Open discussion	<i>Moderator: Nasser Yassin</i> Jamela Al Raiby (WHO EMRO) Nahida Al Lawati (Oman MOPH) Habiba Triki (Tunisia MOPH) Samir Anouti (UNFPA)

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<i>Time</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Speaker</i>
9:00-9:15	Opening remarks	
9:15-10:30	Tackling systems, stereotypes and interactions	<i>Moderator: Taghreed El Hajj</i> Sawsan Abdulrahim (AUB) Jad Melki (LAU) Maha Damaj (UNICEF Oman) Sonia Ilias (UNFPA Lebanon)
10:30-11:30	Exploring risks in adolescence 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alcohol</li> <li>• Youth sexual and reproductive health: A regional insight</li> <li>• Sexual &amp; reproductive health risks facing adolescents in Egypt</li> </ul>	<i>Moderator: Faysal El Kak</i> Lilian Ghandour (AUB) Mamdouh Wahba (ACAM, Egypt) Faysal El Kak (AUB)
11:30-11:45	BREAK	
11:45-12:45	Exploring risks in adolescence 2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tobacco</li> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Mental Health</li> </ul>	<i>Moderator: Hala Ghattas</i> Rima Nakkash (AUB) Carla Makhoulf (AUB) Alexandra Chen (Harvard)
12:45-2:00	Crafting Relevant Responses	<i>Moderator: Rana Saleh</i> Eslam Elhossieny (Y-Peer) Diana Abu Abbas (Marsa, Lebanon) Sharif Ba Alawi (IFMSA) Nadia Nameh (4 all causes) Madeleine Balaam (University of Newcastle)
2:00-3:00	LUNCH	
3:00-4:00	Regional evidence initiatives: UNICEF good practices GAGE A/YFHS National youth policy	<i>Moderator: Aline Germani</i> IDER DUNGERDORJ (UNICEF MENARO) Ingrid Gercama (GAGE UK) Alice Armstrong (WHO Geneva) Naeem Almutawakel (ESCWA)
4:00-5:00	Voices of youth through theatre	<i>Moderator: Ahmed Ali</i> Jordan YPEER Center Alaa Hammad (trainer) Eslam Elhossieny Enas Dar Yacoub Amine Souilhi Bushra Abbas Khamees Sabra Ahmad Gomaa
5:00-5:30	Closing Session	Rima Afifi Cynthia El Khoury