Public Health Program

Promoting health policies based on social inclusion, human rights, justice, and scientific evidence





The Open Society Institute's Public Health Program aims to promote health policies based on social inclusion, human rights, justice, and scientific evidence. The program works with local, national, and international civil society organizations to combat the social marginalization and stigma that lead to poor health, to facilitate access to health information, and to foster greater civil society engagement in public health policy and practice.

The Public Health Program promotes the participation and interests of socially marginalized groups in public health policy and fosters greater government accountability and transparency through civil society monitoring and advocacy, with an emphasis on HIV and AIDS.

Public health problems are intensified in societies where stigma leaves citizens socially excluded. The ability of those affected to voice their concerns and to participate in health advocacy and policymaking helps to counter social marginalization and the abuse of authority.

A citizenry that actively monitors the policies, actions, and budgets of governments also helps bring about responsive solutions to public health issues. The Public Health Program works to ensure that civil society has the information, skills, and capacity to hold governments accountable.

Today, the global nature of health crises requires greater commitment, action, and funding at national and international levels. Innovative responses—such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria—pave the way for solutions that include the participation of civil society. However, as commitments and resources increase, it is necessary to ensure that they reach and benefit the public. Strong and independent citizens' groups play an instrumental role in ensuring that government, health care institutions, and health programs are held accountable to the communities they are designed to serve.



addressing the health needs of marginalized populations

Public health issues among socially marginalized populations are often severe due to poverty, powerlessness, and exclusion. This invisibility is a persistent obstacle to improving health, making it difficult to access resources and services. The Public Health Program works to promote the participation of all citizens, especially those who are socially marginalized, in public health policy debates and to ensure that their rights and needs are addressed.

International Harm Reduction Development

The International Harm Reduction Development Program supports programs and policy reform to reduce HIV transmission and other adverse individual and social consequences associated with illicit drug use. Using a pragmatic approach based on human rights, public health principles, and scientific evidence, the program seeks to expand access to HIV prevention through such strategies as needle exchange and opiate substitution treatment, to improve drug users' access to HIV and AIDS treatment and other health care, and to reform discriminatory public policy.

Sexual Health and Rights

The Sexual Health and Rights Project supports efforts to advance the sexual health and rights of socially marginalized populations at risk for HIV and AIDS, such as sex workers; prisoners; and gay, lesbian, transsexual, and transgender populations. The project supports innovative service models, legal advocacy, policy analysis, and civil society participation around issues of sexual health and rights to ensure that needs are better met.

Palliative Care

The International Palliative Care Initiative works to integrate palliative care into national health care plans, policies, delivery systems, and health care professional and public education, and to ensure the availability of essential drugs for pain and symptom management for adults and children with life-limiting illnesses such as cancer and HIV and AIDS. The initiative promotes the inclusion of palliative care in governmental and nongovernmental funding strategies, advocates for policy reform, encourages global and regional networking, and supports leadership development to provide palliative care services.



HIV/AIDS and Civil Society

The HIV/AIDS and Civil Society Project encourages persons living with HIV and AIDS to play an integral role in designing and implementing national and global responses to the pandemic. The project supports networks such as the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS, the Namibian Women's Leadership Center, and the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa, which foster debate and advocate on policy issues. The project also supports public health policy fellows in Africa and monitoring efforts to improve public health financing and programs. The project works in tandem with OSI's local foundations and other network initiatives to bring a multifaceted approach to policy analysis and advocacy.

Roma Health

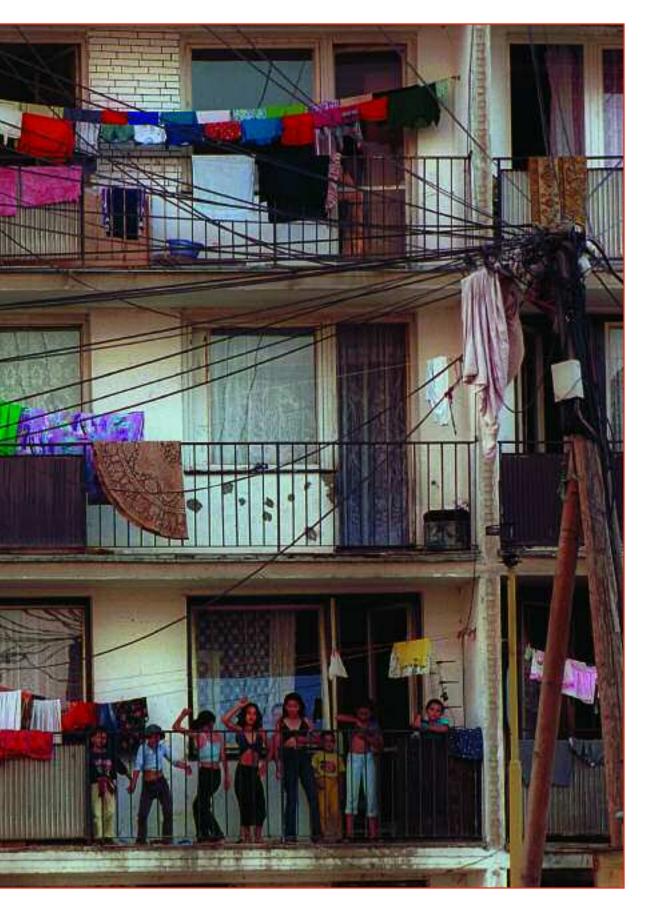
The Roma Health Project supports government partners and civil society groups to design and advocate for policies that will improve Romani health, promote equal access to health services for Roma and their communities, and build capacity and integrate health care into community-driven development in Romani communities.

ensuring accountability through civil society leadership and monitoring efforts

The Public Health Program also works collaboratively to build and strengthen civil society's capacity to foster accountability and promote participation and respect for human rights in the development and implementation of public health policy. The program employs a range of approaches to this end, including monitoring, legal strategies, the media, leadership development, and strategic dialogues on public health issues.

Public Health Watch

Public Health Watch promotes and supports civil society monitoring of health policies to ensure that governments live up to the promise of international public health commitments such as the Amsterdam Declaration to Stop Tuberculosis, the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, and the United Nations Millennium Declaration.



Additionally, the Public Health Program supports a variety of civil society monitoring efforts such as monitoring of international health commitments, Global Fund implementation at the national level, government spending on health and HIV and AIDS, tobacco control legislation enforcement, and the health and human rights of marginalized populations. Monitoring activities enable civil society groups to engage in informed dialogue with policymakers to improve the effectiveness of health policies and programs.

Engagement with the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria

The Global Fund is a multilateral funding mechanism that operates in partnership with governments, civil society, the private sector, and affected communities. The Public Health Program supports efforts to strengthen civil society involvement in the Global Fund through a range of activities including technical assistance for harm reduction and palliative care, advocacy for the inclusion of marginalized populations, support to civil society delegations, and monitoring of the Global Fund at country level. A number of Soros foundations are also Global Fund grant recipients or partners.

Law and Health

The Law and Health Initiative promotes civil society efforts to advance health and human rights through law. It supports legal advocacy on behalf of marginalized persons, legislative efforts to advance public health goals, and legal capacity building for health providers and their clients. The initiative aims to foster collaboration among legal, human rights, medical, and public health practitioners and to promote the use of legal remedies as creative tools to advance public health.

Health Media

The Health Media Project aims to increase public awareness of health issues, especially stigmatized health issues involving marginalized populations. The project focuses on building the capacity of public health NGOs to utilize media and communicate effectively with the public. The project also seeks to build the capacity of media professionals to report responsibly on health issues with an emphasis on investigative journalism skills.

Leadership Development

Through engagement with medical leaders, public health institutions, and networks of health professionals, the program develops public health leadership and expertise to improve the quality of health care worldwide. Training programs based in Salzburg help build the capacity of physicians and promote the development of medical and public health leaders in their home countries.

OSI Seminar Series

Through the OSI Seminar Series, the program convenes events that enable civil society, policymakers, funders, government, and business leaders to debate and discuss key policy issues and to forge partnerships on emerging public health concerns.



The Public Health Program works in over 60 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, China, and the Middle East. The program collaborates with Soros foundations or other local partners to develop and fund projects that are responsive and appropriate to local needs.

The Public Health Program cooperates with other OSI programs, including the Open Society Justice Initiative, the Network Media Program, the Information Program, the Network Women's Program, the Roma Participation Program, and the Mental Health Initiative. The program also collaborates with OSI policy offices in London, Brussels, and Washington, D.C., and international organizations to advocate for effective policies on its key public health issues.

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