

Supporting the next wave of health leaders

AstraZeneca's Young Health Programme, in partnership with Unicef, empowers young people to advance health equity and tackle climate-related challenges, says **Pam Cheng**



ILLUSTRATION: PAUL RYDING

As AstraZeneca's executive vice president, global operations, IT and chief sustainability officer, I'm committed to working towards a future where everyone has sustainable, equitable access to healthcare.

Science, innovation and collaboration are the keys to unlocking a healthier future. Working with young people is vital to realising this. As the saying goes, "We don't inherit the earth, we borrow it from our children."

Yet, adolescents often lack representation in climate-policy decisions. At the same time, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as cancers and respiratory diseases, affect over two billion young people globally, with one million children and adolescents dying annually from preventable NCDs. Extreme weather, pollution and biodiversity loss all contribute to rising NCDs.

Recognising adolescence as a crucial period for shaping lifelong wellbeing, our Young Health Programme has partnered with Unicef since 2019 to empower young people to make informed choices and catalyse a global youth-led advocacy movement, addressing both NCDs and climate-related health challenges.

We focus on advancing health equity for young people from underserved communities by

simultaneously working with them to make healthier choices to help prevent NCDs that can occur later in life, such as getting more physical activity, eating healthily and avoiding tobacco use, while also working with health system stakeholders to build a more supportive policy environment.

Together, we've directly reached 8.7 million young people and trained more than 274,000 youth advocates. As a result, 18 laws and policies have been shaped globally, including tobacco regulations in Indonesia that aim to reduce adolescent smoking rates.

Our launch of digital interventions, such as chatbots and coaching tools, has enabled young people to learn about climate-related health impacts and take concrete steps in reducing their environmental footprint.

As we pursue delivering the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, preventing NCDs and climate-related health risks must be prioritised.

Through transformative partnerships, our collective impact exceeds what any single body could achieve alone.

We encourage organisations to drive collective action to advance health equity, address the impact of climate change on public health, and build more resilient health systems - for the benefit of people, society and the planet.

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