

HRH the Crown Princess' remarks at the 68th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe on 17 September 2018

Excerpt.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I mentioned a moment ago, the WHO European Region is often at the forefront of health developments, and this year's agenda proves no exception. For the first time, this group will discuss a strategy for men's health. And here the very essence of the strategy is different. It seeks to improve men's health and well-being; through gender responsive approaches, challenging traditional norms around masculinity and calling on us to rethink gender stereotypes and break down the barriers existing between programs. Its vision is lifelong and intergenerational. Looking at the way in which we live our lives, and how our health is interconnected with so many factors, is very much in the spirit of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The Strategy for men's health points to gender equality as a priority for men's health, and it highlights transitions in life as important opportunities to improve health for all. Think about one such transition – into fatherhood – that joyous, poignant moment many of us look back on tenderly when we became a parent. This time could present a golden opportunity for men to boost their child's, their partner's and their own physical and mental health. When fathers are involved in caring for their child from an early stage, there are health pay-offs. Studies show that "hands on" dads live longer, have fewer physical and mental health problems, are more productive at work, have fewer accidents and express more satisfaction with their lives.

A recent survey of over 1,000 fathers in Denmark found that 78% thought more about their own health after becoming a father. Over 50% drank less alcohol, and 43% of those who were smokers before, stopped smoking after the birth of their child. This is not only good news for their own health, but also for the health of their partners and children.

We must ensure that fathers can grasp this golden opportunity through involving them in antenatal classes, training health professionals to include partners to a much greater extent, allowing for paternity leave and increasing social acceptance of such leave, reflecting on our own attitudes and behaviours, and so on.

I have long been active in promoting the health of mothers and children. We cannot achieve real and sustainable improvements in maternal and child health without the engagement of men in caregiving and, also in their own health.

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