AFREhealth's 8th Annual Conference: Rethinking Public Health in a Globalized World

The African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) successfully convened its 8th Annual Conference in Dakar, Senegal, from September 22-24, 2025. This significant event marked a new milestone for the forum, as it was the first time the conference was hosted in a Francophone country. Hosted by Université Rose Dieng France-Sénégal, the conference was a resounding success, conducted bilingually to ensure broad participation and communication. The venue for this highly anticipated gathering was the Azalai Hotel.

A Global Forum for African Health Solutions

AFREhealth stands as a crucial interdisciplinary grouping of health professionals dedicated to enhancing the quality of healthcare across Africa. It achieves this by collaborating with Ministries of Health, training institutions, and other stakeholders, focusing its efforts on research, education, and capacity building. The forum itself is a robust conglomerate, bringing together individuals, institutions, associations, and networks from all four linguistic regions of Africa: Anglophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and Arabophone. Membership is open to all African and external stakeholders who share the commitment to fostering strong, self-sustaining, and robust health systems on the continent.

The Dakar conference served as a vital platform, uniting health experts, practitioners, educators, researchers, and partners from across Africa and around the globe. The shared objective was to exchange knowledge, experiences, and innovative solutions to the continent's most pressing and complex health challenges.

Diverse Attendance and International Collaboration

The 8th Annual Conference demonstrated a remarkable level of international and professional diversity. A total of 812 participants registered for the event, with 161 choosing to attend in person. These attendees represented an impressive 28 different countries worldwide[14].

African representation was particularly strong, with the largest contingents hailing from Uganda, Senegal, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria. Furthermore, the presence of delegates from nations like Belgium, Spain, the United States, and the United Kingdom significantly enriched the international dimension of the discussions, ensuring a broad range of global perspectives were included. The gender distribution among attendees was well-balanced, with 55% male and 45% female participants.

The professional expertise at the conference spanned numerous disciplines essential to public health, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of AFREhealth's mission. Health professionals and students were well-represented from fields including Medicine, Nursing and Midwifery, Public Health, Laboratory Science, Epidemiology, Biomedical Sciences, Physiotherapy, and Clinical Psychology. This diverse and inclusive environment, cutting across gender, nationality, and professional backgrounds, was a key characteristic of the event.

Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde, Immediate Past President of AFREhealth

Addressing Critical Health Challenges Through Focused Themes

The overarching theme for the 8th conference was highly relevant to the current global climate: "Rethinking public health in a globalized world". This central theme was explored through several critical sub-themes that focused on Africa's immediate and future health priorities:

- Emergency preparedness and management of infectious, neglected tropical, and non-communicable diseases.
- Advance research, innovation, and technology, including the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and digital health, specifically tailored to Africa's needs.
- Building a sustainable health workforce capable of addressing Africa's priority health challenges.
- Combating climate change and health, and developing strategies for resilience.

Conference Structure and Key Takeaways

The conference featured a robust schedule designed to facilitate deep engagement and knowledge sharing. The program included 9 plenary sessions, 10 workshops, 3 panels, and 10 abstract sessions. In total, 29 distinguished plenary speakers presented on the various sub-themes, bringing authoritative voices and diverse viewpoints to the discussions.

The call for abstracts yielded 231 submissions, demonstrating the high level of research activity in the African health sector. A vast majority 218 abstractswere accepted for presentation, split into 155 oral presentations and 63 poster presentations.

The abstract-driven sessions covered a wide array of specialized topics, including Maternal and Child Health, Communicable Diseases, Cancer Research, Medical and Nursing Education Research, Interprofessional Education and Collaborative Practice (IPECP), Health Professional Education, Health Systems Strengthening and Service Delivery, Health Workforce Development and Well-being, Quality Services, and Climate Change Resilience. The formal proceedings also included an Annual General Meeting for AFREhealth members.

Inaugural Address and Vision for the Future

The opening ceremony was a distinguished event, attended by the Minister of Education of Senegal. The inaugural address was delivered by Prof. Adama Faye, a physician and Professor of Public Health at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar. He set the tone for the conference by defining public health as "the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging life, and improving mental and physical health through collective action."

Prof. Faye urged participants to rethink public health in a globalized world through the lens of equity, social justice, and the decolonization of knowledge and practice. He identified key contemporary challenges, including health emergencies, shortages in human resources, and climate change. Addressing these issues, he stressed, requires integrated and context-specific approaches supported by diverse leadership.

Overall, the meeting was highly successful.