Health Systems Under Pressure: Financing, Workforce Wellbeing, and Climate Change in Africa



This issue of the *Africa Health Journal (AHJ)* comes at a critical moment for health systems in Africa and globally. Health financing has emerged as a dominant theme across many health fora, particularly in the African region, following significant shifts in global funding priorities.

The issue opens with an Opinion piece by Francis Omaswa, informed by discussions on the Global Health Architecture (GHA) and its influence on African health systems. His reflections stem from a meeting convened by Amref Health Africa and sponsored by the Wellcome Trust in Kigali in November 2025. Omaswa provides a historical overview of the GHA and challenges the notion that Africa's persistent health challenges can be attributed solely to its structure or operation. Instead, he argues that limited political and technical leadership, inadequate investment in leadership development, and weak capacity for health workforce planning within African countries are critical constraints. Importantly, he concludes that with stronger leadership and institutional capacity, Africa can actively shape the GHA to advance its own priorities and deliver better health outcomes for its populations.

This issue also features reports from four major conferences held between September and November 2025, each contributing to the discourse on health systems strengthening and innovation. These include the Network Towards Unity for Health (TUFH) conference in Philadelphia, USA; the African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth) conference in Dakar, Senegal; the World Conference on Lung Health in Copenhagen, Denmark, which highlighted advances in artificial intelligence for tuberculosis detection and surveillance; and the 12th Annual Conference of the Consortium of New Sub-Saharan African Medical Schools (CONSAMS), hosted by the Technical University of Mombasa in Kenya. Collectively, these meetings reflect Africa's growing engagement in global knowledge exchange, health professions education, and technological innovation.

Health financing is further explored in an article by Khalifa Elmusharaf on the economic burden of disease. He argues that African countries incur far greater costs from disease than those reflected in national health budgets. These "hidden" costs manifesting as lost productivity, diminished human capital, and constrained economic growth often dwarf direct health expenditures. By focusing on the cost of inaction, Elmusharaf demonstrates how estimating the true economic burden of disease can provide powerful evidence to align health and finance sector priorities. Drawing on existing research, he outlines practical actions governments can take to prevent escalating losses and promote sustainable development.

Health workforce development and wellbeing form another key theme in this issue. Ian Couper's article introduces Longitudinal Integrated Clerkships (LICs), describing their benefits for students, patients, and health systems. Using examples from Africa and other regions, he illustrates how LICs can contribute to producing health professionals who are socially accountable. This discussion is particularly relevant for Africa, where the quality, distribution, and retention of health workers remain enduring challenges.

Building on this focus, Joel Okullo reports on the outcomes of the 27th Annual Conference of the Association of Medical Councils of Africa. The conference theme, "The Balanced Approach," called for a reimagined model of health regulation that balances authority with empathy while prioritising practitioner wellbeing, digital readiness, equity, and patient safety. Okullo argues that compassionate, data-driven, and collaborative regulation is essential for building resilient and trustworthy health systems.

Global health financing and trust are revisited in an article by Elsie Kiguli-Malwadde and colleagues, based on the 2025 Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) white paper, Unravelling Trust. The authors examine how abrupt policy reversals disrupted life-saving programmes, undermined decades of scientific and diplomatic progress, and eroded trust in the United States as a global health partner. Echoing themes from Omaswa's Opinion.

Four short articles broaden the scope of this issue. Maya Fakhfakh explores participation as a bridge between patient care and community leadership. Another highlights emerging evidence linking root canal treatment to reduced risks of heart disease and diabetes. A third underscores the importance of adaptation finance in strengthening health systems in the face of climate-related threats. The final by David Okello, draws attention to hazardous medical waste management as a critical public health concern and proposes practical solutions to mitigate its impact.

We also pay tribute to our late colleague, Dr Peter Paul Eriki, whose contributions to health and medical education are remembered with deep respect.

As always, this issue includes our Medicine Digest, quiz, news updates, and advertisements. The Africa Health Journal is an open-access, web-based publication available at www.africa-health.com, updated daily and actively engaging audiences through social media. We invite our readers and partners to continue supporting both the print and digital editions as we work collectively to strengthen health systems across Africa.

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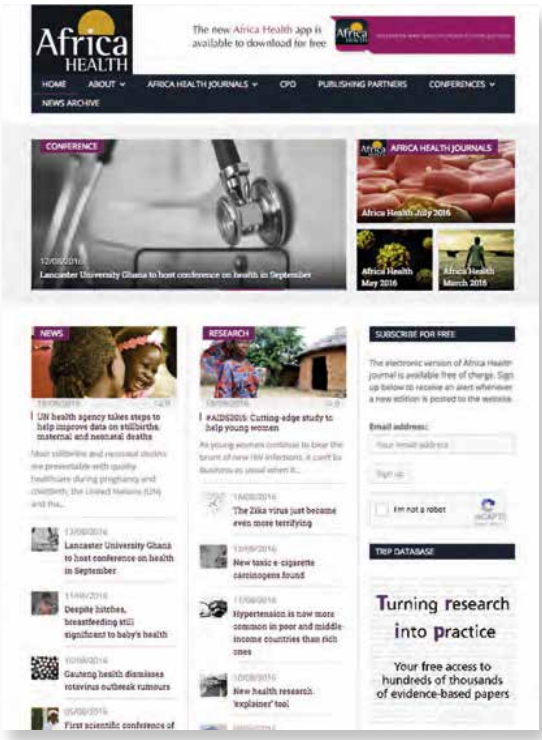
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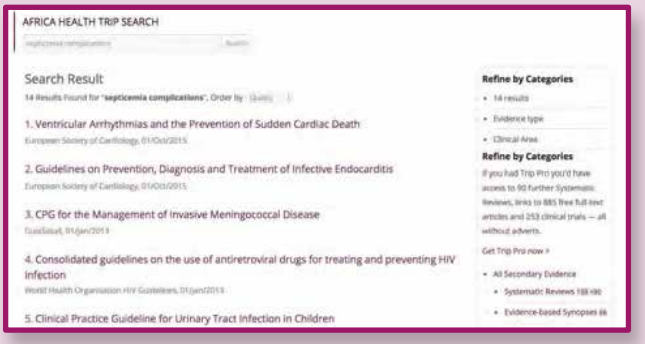
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