

# Human Rights & Human Welfare

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## Human Rights and Health

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# Human Rights and Health

## Introduction by Paul Hunt

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Over fifty years ago, the constitution of the World Health Organization recognized the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental human right. Since then, the right to the highest attainable standard of health (“*right to health*”) has been enshrined in a series of international and regional human rights treaties, as well as in over 100 constitutions worldwide.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights includes as a central provision the right to health in international human rights law: “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health” (article 12). International treaties also recognize a range of other human rights of central relevance to health, including the rights to adequate shelter, food, education, privacy, non-discrimination and the prohibition against torture.

- There are a variety of links between health and human rights:
- Violations of, or inattention to, human rights can have serious consequences for health;
- Health policies and programs can either promote or violate human rights in the way that they are designed or implemented;
- Vulnerability and the impact of ill-health can be reduced by taking steps to respect, protect and fulfill human rights.

Human rights are relevant to a great many health issues, including prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS; sexual and reproductive health; access to clean water and adequate sanitation; medical confidentiality; access to education and information on health; access to drugs; and the health of marginalized and vulnerable groups such as women, ethnic and racial minorities, refugees and people with disabilities. Human rights are also relevant to promoting health in broader contexts, such as in armed conflict, poverty reduction strategies, and international trade.

I greatly welcome this initiative by *Human Rights & Human Welfare* to draw together literature on the relationship between health and human rights. This resource will serve as a very useful starting point for research on many issues that are central to the promotion and protection of human rights in the contemporary world.

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