

## Strategic urban health action to unlock healthy, prosperous, and resilient societies

On World Cities Day, the World Health Organisation (WHO) called on national and city leaders to transform urban areas into engines of health, equity and sustainability.

More than 4.4 billion people lived in urban areas, a figure projected to rise to nearly 70% by 2050. In cities, health, inequality, environment and economy intersected in powerful ways, creating complex risks and opportunities.

The worst health outcomes were concentrated in slums and informal settlements, where 1.1 billion people endured unsafe housing, inadequate sanitation, food insecurity and rising exposure to floods and heat, a number expected to treble by 2050.

With the guide launched on World Cities Day, taking a strategic approach to urban health, WHO provided concrete ideas for a new era of urban health action. It responded to the demand for integrated solutions and offered the first comprehensive framework to help governments plan urban health strategically.

*"Taking a Strategic Approach to Urban Health"* outlines practical steps for governments to:

- understand the complexity of urban systems and how they shape health and equity;
- identify entry points for action, recognising opportunities to build urban health across policy and practice agendas in other sectors and issues;
- strengthen the means of implementation for urban health, including governance, financing, data, analytics, innovation, capacity-strengthening, partnerships and participation; and
- develop comprehensive urban health strategies at both national and city levels.

Alongside the Guide, WHO launched the first three modules of an Urban Health E-learning course, hosted by the WHO Academy, to strengthen capacities for collaborative work in urban contexts.

Source: World Health Organisation



PHOTO COURTESY: WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION

### WORLD PREMATURITY DAY 2025

## Give preterm babies a strong start for a hopeful future

Every year, World Prematurity Day (15 November) highlights the urgent need to care for babies born too soon. This year's theme echoes WHO's *Healthy Beginnings, Hopeful Futures* campaign, reminding us that every child deserves a fair chance at life, starting from their very first moments.

Globally, 1 in 10 babies is preterm, with most preventable deaths occurring in low- and middle-income countries. Very preterm babies, especially those under 32 weeks, face life-threatening complications such as underdeveloped lungs, brains, and immune systems, as well as difficulty regulating temperature.

While almost all very preterm babies survive in high-income countries, survival in the poorest settings is rare.

#### Key actions to protect preterm babies:

- Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) – skin-to-skin contact prevents hypothermia, strengthens bonding, and improves survival.
- Early and exclusive breastfeeding – provides immunity, supports growth, and promotes development.
- Respiratory support – non-invasive ventilation, like CPAP, saves lives and reduces complications.
- Infection prevention – clean environments and timely access to antibiotics reduce risks.



• Family-centred care – keeping parents close, involving them in care decisions, and supporting emotional and practical needs improves outcomes.

#### System-level interventions:

- Invest in neonatal units, trained staff, life-saving equipment, and dedicated spaces.
- Strengthen maternal health services to prevent preterm births and detect complications early.
- Provide equitable access to care so survival does not depend on geography or income.
- Support families with financial, emotional, and practical resources during hospitalisation.

Failing to provide these interventions not only loses lives but also loses futures filled with potential. By acting now, communities, health systems, and governments can ensure that every preterm baby has a strong start, survives, and thrives, turning fragile beginnings into hopeful futures.

Source: World Health Organisation



### A Quiet Battle with Cancer

For years, his life was all about the hustle. As a Businessman in Mymensingh, his days were filled with site visits, client meetings, and the noise of business. He used to live life in his own way without any restrictions. But since June 2022, the noise has faded, and life has changed for Shah Md. Fakhrul Islam.

With a simple breakfast and tea, he starts his day. There is no rush to get to work anymore. "I don't go out unless I really have to," he says calmly. "Whatever I earned in my earlier days, I am surviving on that now. This is the new reality for a former businessman fighting Stage

4 Lung Cancer. It is a battle he is fighting not with panic, but with quiet faith.

#### It all started in 2022

A supposedly routine checkup turned into a nightmare. The diagnosis was Lung Cancer. But it wasn't caught early—it was Stage 4. The cancer had already spread from his lungs to his brain and throat. "When I heard Stage 4, I was terrified," Fakhrul Islam admits. He didn't wait after knowing that. He immediately flew to Chennai, India, for treatment.

#### Fighting the expenses and exhaustion

Fakhrul Islam realised that buying medicine abroad costs too much. He gets his prescriptions from Indian doctors but buys the medicine from

Bangladesh. This arrangement somewhat relieves his stress a little bit. Every 21 days, he makes the trip from Mymensingh to Dhaka for chemotherapy and immunotherapy. "The immunotherapy helped a lot," he says. "After my first chemo, I lost all my hair. But once the immunotherapy started, the hair loss stopped." But looking fine and feeling fine are two different things. For three or four days after every treatment, the side effects hit hard. "I lose all taste in my mouth.

Inside, it feels like my mouth is full of sores. I get irritated easily," he shares.

#### An unpredictable comeback

For a while, it felt like he was

-Shah Md. Fakhrul Islam  
Lung Cancer Survivor

**BEACON**  
Light for life

## From awareness to action: Making workplaces diabetes-smart

### ABEDA SULTANA

Diabetes continues to rise at an alarming rate. Globally, 7 out of 10 (412 million) adults living with diabetes are of working age. Three out of four people with diabetes report feeling anxious, depressed, or having other mental health issues due to their condition. Managing diabetes at work negatively affects the mental well-being of 4 in 10 employees with the condition.

People living with diabetes often face unfair treatment and barriers in the workplace, including harassment and bullying due to misunderstanding or stigma. The workplace has emerged as a critical battleground in the fight against this chronic disease. Long sitting hours, shift work, irregular meal patterns, and high job stress make it harder for patients to manage their condition.

Many employees are also denied essential breaks for snacks and rest. Employees with poorly controlled diabetes may experience fatigue, reduced concentration, frequent sick leave, and complications that affect productivity. They may be overlooked for career development or training opportunities, which limits their professional growth. Some feel uncomfortable monitoring their condition openly at work or are refused time off for necessary medical appointments. There is a lack of workplace policies to support people with diabetes.

A diabetes-friendly workplace is not a luxury; it is a necessity in today's world. Workplaces can become more supportive for employees with diabetes by introducing helpful policies, creating a non-judgemental environment, and offering understanding and care.

The International Diabetes Federation outlines ten strategies for workplaces to do more for diabetes care and prevention. This includes offering private spaces for diabetes management, access to healthy food, water, and necessary breaks, as well as promoting physical activity and mental well-being. Employers should allow flexible working arrangements and organise regular screenings for early detection. Having trained first aiders and emergency supplies ensures safety, while awareness materials help reduce stigma and increase understanding across the workforce. Overall, such efforts promote a supportive and healthy workplace, which can reduce absenteeism, improve job satisfaction, and boost overall productivity.

In addition, workplaces should implement anti-discrimination policies to protect employees with diabetes, provide education and training for managers and colleagues to reduce stigma and support mental well-being, ensure access to diabetes tools and technology, foster peer support networks, and monitor the effectiveness of workplace interventions to improve health outcomes and productivity.

By adopting these comprehensive measures, employers can create an environment where employees with diabetes feel supported, safe, and empowered to manage their condition effectively. Such proactive approaches not only enhance individual health and well-being but also strengthen overall workplace performance, engagement, and organisational resilience, benefiting both employees and employers alike.

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## WORK WITHOUT PAIN

### The role of workstation ergonomics in musculoskeletal health

#### BIIJOY DAS

Musculoskeletal health has become a growing concern in today's modern workplace, where most professionals spend long hours sitting at computers or doing the same thing over and over. Work-related health issues like back pain, neck stiffness, shoulder tension, and issues with the wrist or knee are now common. These conditions often develop gradually due to poor posture, improper workstation design, and lack of movement – all of which contribute to strain on the spine, joints, ligaments, and muscles.

**The science of safe work design:** Ergonomics is the science of designing the workplace to fit the worker – not forcing the worker to fit the workstation. A well-designed workstation keeps the body in a neutral position, reduces fatigue, and keeps any one part of the body from being put under too much stress. Key Principles of Workstation Ergonomics

1. Chair and sitting posture
  - Choose a chair with armrests, lumbar support, and a height that can be adjusted. Keep your feet flat on a footrest or the floor. The angles of your hips and knees should be between 90 and 100 degrees. Using lumbar support, the

natural curve of the lower back can be maintained. Stand or walk for two to three minutes every thirty minutes to break up long periods of sitting.

#### 2. Desk and monitor position

- The top of the monitor should be at or slightly below eye level.
- The screen should be about an arm's length away.
- Keep the keyboard and mouse close enough to avoid overreaching.
- Wrists should remain straight, not bent upwards or downwards.
- 3. Keyboard and mouse use
  - Use an ergonomic keyboard and mouse designed to keep wrists in a neutral position.
  - Avoid resting wrists on hard surfaces; use a soft wrist pad if needed.

#### 4. Work habits and movement

- Every hour, take a few minutes to stretch and move around. Rotate tasks, if possible, to avoid repetitive strain.
- Perform simple neck, shoulder, and back stretches during breaks.
- To maintain healthy muscles and joints, drink plenty of water and exercise regularly.

5. Lighting and environment
  - Make sure the lighting is right so you don't strain your eyes or put

your head forward.

• Reduce glare on the monitor by adjusting its position or using filters.

• Maintain a comfortable room temperature to prevent stiffness.

• Keeping the joints and spine safe because the spine is the body's central pillar, even minor stress can have long-term effects.

• Maintaining a neutral spine posture, where the natural curves of the neck, thoracic, and lumbar regions are preserved, is essential.

• Avoid slouching or leaning forward for long durations.

• Knees should be bent, not the waist, when lifting. Use both hands and keep the load close to your body.

A healthy spine and joint system are essential for a productive and pain-free working life. Employees can avoid musculoskeletal injuries by following ergonomic guidelines, sitting in the right position, and moving throughout the day.

Organisations that prioritise ergonomic safety not only safeguard the health of their workforce but also enhance efficiency, morale, and overall job satisfaction.

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