

Meeting: Executive Board 142

Agenda Item: 4.5 Improving access to assistive technology

Statement:

MMI appreciates the opportunity to present its views on agenda item 4.5. The statement is supported by PHM.

We compliment WHO for recognizing the gaps in access to assistive technologies and for proposing a plan to make assistive devices and technologies accessible. The 'Global Coordinated Plan' will help people with disabilities and the elderly lead healthy and productive lives. It is important to underline that social welfare, assistive devices & technologies, early intervention, adequate rehabilitation services, and inclusive and enabling environments are basic rights for people with disabilities.

No person who can benefit from assistive technologies should be denied access because of unaffordability or unavailability of such technologies. The global plan presented in the EB document should consider the need to centrally involve people with disabilities in further elaboration and implementation of the plan. It is also necessary to ensure that the approach to persons with disabilities is not overly medicalised.

We urge WHO to assist countries with technical expertise that supports their health systems in effectively understanding the functional requirements, and rational use of assistive technologies and devices. To ensure availability, access and affordability, we urge member states to formulate national level 'Priority Assistive Products Lists' based on efficiency and need. The national list should be supported by initiatives involving technological cooperation to encourage local manufacturing capabilities in LMICs. WHO's support would be crucial in building capacities for manufacture and maintenance of assistive devices in countries where such capacity is weak.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that WHO should collaborate with the Inter-Agency Support Group for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. WHO must also ensure that partnerships it engages with are free from conflicts of interest.