

PHM's Vision: Building a movement toward Health for All through grassroots political action

The People's Health Movement has adopted the Right to Health as an overarching theme and framework. PHM's approach to the role of human rights is distinct from the way many others have implemented human rights-based approaches to health. PHM appropriately politicizes the issue of health and applies human rights values and principles to building grassroots-based political movements. We understand that the health status of people is a social product and that profound social transformations are needed to reach the goal of Health for All.

The PHM approach to human rights and Health for All

Since international instruments do not address mechanisms for attaining human rights, PHM plans concerted global action to mobilize a movement to secure Health for All. PHM's view of human rights therefore:

- stresses the centrality of social movements to achieving all rights,
- engages in a political economy critique of neo-liberal globalization and privatization processes,
- proposes an alternative social developmental model as the path for fulfilling social and economic rights.

Our rights-based approach to health is a dynamic framework that adapts to changing circumstances and contexts. In essence, our understanding of the Right to Health and how to achieve it is constantly evolving. The struggle for the Right to Health can take many shapes—from resisting extractive and polluting industries to exposing harmful health policies. However, all actions share the same underlying principles:

- People affected by human rights violations must lead the struggle against them.
- The fulfillment of the human Right to Health requires respect for the environment.
- States have the legal duty to fulfill human rights, but individuals, institutions and other groups also have such duties.
- Our actions must embody the values of dignity, solidarity, equity/equality, justice, and inclusion.
- We must pay attention to both processes and outcomes in our actions toward the Right to Health.
- We must analyze the conditions and socio-political structures that are responsible for human rights violations and challenge their root causes.

Our analysis of health problems and their underlying causes have led us to certain conclusions about how health systems can fulfill human rights and promote health:

- The profit motive must be eliminated from health systems.
- Health services must be planned, managed and delivered in the community with the support of an accountable national public health system
- Health professions education must adopt a new model that trains health workers to fulfill their human rights duties to patients and support the communities they work in to address the underlying determinants of health.



Moving beyond conventional human rights strategies

The conventional concept of human rights is overly reliant on international human rights law and limits the potential of rights-based action. Legal strategies often do not consider the structural constraints that prevent realizing human rights and do not acknowledge the important role of sociopolitical mobilization in achieving the shifts in power necessary for social transformation. They consider each right in isolation from others, although health is dependent upon the fulfillment of all rights. Conventional human rights approaches tend to separate human rights from the historical context of sacrifice and suffering that prompted the need for legal human rights standards.

The international human rights framework does represent an evolving ideology and provides minimum standards, which give legitimacy to the political act of saying 'this is wrong.' However, it lags behind the understanding of rights that is emerging from global social movements. When this international framework is decoupled from the practice of producing health and the recognition of the profound changes necessary to fully realize the Right to Health, it can distract from the work that needs to be done. And when depoliticized, this framework appears simply to be the product of well-meaning international bodies rather than the culmination of decades of struggle in oppressive social contexts.

While taking into account the conventional concept of human rights, PHM moves beyond this, fostering action by and with the people who bear the burden of inequities in health systems dominated by misguided policies and principles. It brings the fight center stage, giving light to the sacrifice and suffering endured. PHM gives a powerful and united voice to the struggle through building local, regional and international coalitions and through actions agreed upon during the People's Health Assemblies and efforts such as the Right to Health and Health Care Campaign.

Right to Health and Health Care Campaign: Developing action toward the Right to Health

Based on this conceptualization of the Right to Health, PHM implemented its Right to Health and Health Care Campaign in 2007. With 15 countries participating, the potential for the rights-based approach to health to achieve necessary social transformation has become evident. Country circles have evaluated the Right to Health in their respective countries. They have used the information gathered to educate and mobilize local communities, make demands on governments, and to assert that public health issues and the Right to Health be made a higher priority of the state.

The Campaign takes a new direction in 2012. PHM, together with like-minded organizations and networks, will promote its rights-based approach to health as a mobilizing platform. It will focus on some common themes that can be addressed by any means that are relevant to the conditions and capacities of the respective country. These themes include universal access to care, essential medicines and public health services, health sector privatization, health equity, and the social determinants of health. The Campaign will support health activists working in diverse contexts to develop Right to Health strategies and actions. Collaboration at regional, national and global levels will be an impetus for new action and change.

To realize the human Right to Health we must stand firmly together with and as poor and oppressed people, in struggle to build the mass sociopolitical mobilization necessary for social transformation. PHM is a growing network that fights for the Right to Health in a manner that exceeds the conventional approach to human rights. Action on Right to Health should not be limited to legal frameworks, but will adapt to evolving health rights issues to mobilize the masses and incite political change.

Let us join together to achieve Health for All Now!

Access PHM's full position paper on the Right to Health here:
<http://www.phmovement.org/en/campaigns/145/page>

For an introduction to the Right to Health:
"The Human Rights Based Approach in a Nutshell"
<http://prezi.com/iqye1p8b0dnh/the-rights-based-approach-in-a-nutshell/>

