

CONCEPT NOTE

TECHNICAL MEETING TO ENHANCE NURTURING CARE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN THE HEALTH SECTOR

25 to 28 February 2025

Nairobi, Kenya

Co-organized by the World Health Organization office for Africa (WHO AFRO) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Background

The Nurturing Care Framework, launched in 2018, has transformed our understanding of what all children need to survive and thrive. According to the global Progress Report, released in 2023, the Framework has provided a common language bringing together multiple sectors and stakeholders, reframed early childhood development as an outcome, elevated attention and support for the development of our youngest children (pregnancy to age 3) and put caregivers and their children at the centre of policies and services. The health sector has played an instrumental role in implementing the Nurturing Care Framework through its coordination with other sectors (e.g., the multisectoral policies and coordination mechanisms) as well as through its efforts to promote all five components of nurturing care and caregiver well-being through routine health and nutrition services.

Examples of efforts spearheaded by the health sector in Eastern and Southern Africa include:

- Developing or updating relevant plans, guidance, training packages, clinical records, home-based records and tools to include attention to nurturing care and caregiver well-being,
- Building the capacity of the health workforce to counsel caregivers on responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning in facilities, waiting areas and in communities,
- Monitoring children's development and putting in place mechanisms to identify and support those children requiring additional support,
- Promoting and supporting caregiver well-being in facilities and in communities,
- Making health facilities more nurturing by making them more accessible and family friendly, including through the provision of play areas,
- Communicating the importance of nurturing care through mass media and audiovisual materials in waiting areas,
- Strengthening coordination within the health sector and with other sectors.

Amidst all of the progress there are many ongoing challenges such as building a workforce fit for purpose; defining the roles and responsibilities of the different cadres in the workforce; developing the three levels of support (universal, targeted and indicated) to ensure care and support for all children according to their individual needs; determining what is feasible to mainstream in each contact; scaling up efforts beyond pilot or demonstration regions; strengthening the linkages between facility-based and community-based services; and ensuring balanced attention to promotion, prevention, identification and treatment.

Since 2018, there have been multiple opportunities for countries to meet and exchange experiences. For instance, the Southern Africa (Lusaka, Zambia, 2023) or Eastern Africa (Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, 2024) conferences on early childhood development or the Eastern and Southern Africa meetings on

ECD financing (Johannesburg, South Africa 2023), the measurement of ECD (Kigali, Rwanda, 2023) and multiple conferences of the Pediatric Associations in Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique. These gatherings sought to enhance the work across sectors and primarily emphasized efforts related to leadership, policy, financing and measurement. These multisectoral gatherings have played an important role in enabling all sectors to learn from each other and move together at national level.

In March 2024, a side event was organized alongside the Eastern Africa ECD conference on early childhood development to explore the role of the health sector and experiences from Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda with promoting nurturing care. This was the first opportunity since 2019 for a set of countries to share their experiences within the health sector. It was acknowledged that more opportunities are needed for the health sector to come together and reflect on progress in the health sector specifically.

This Technical Meeting will, therefore, focus on efforts in the health sector to enhance nurturing care and caregiver well-being. It will provide an opportunity for participating countries to take stock of progress, be inspired by and learn from neighbouring countries, identify areas that merit further attention, and define a roadmap for action.

MEETING OBJECTIVES

The primary goal is to assist governments in enhancing focus on all five components of nurturing care and caregiver well-being within and through the healthcare sector.

Objectives:

- To introduce countries to the foundational concepts, relevant guidance, resources, and opportunities that can enhance nurturing care and caregiver well-being in health systems.
- To share and learn from practical experiences of countries in strengthening health systems to improve nurturing care for early childhood development and caregiver well-being at national and sub-national levels.
- To gather feedback on a draft set of global standards for enhancing nurturing care for early childhood development in health and nutrition services.
- To outline priority actions for the advancement of nurturing care for early childhood development in health systems at national, regional, and global levels.

Expected outcomes:

- Enhanced practical experiences and improved capabilities among country teams to bolster existing health and nutrition services, ensuring comprehensive delivery of all five components of nurturing care.
- Identification of country-specific priority actions that aim to strengthen pertinent policies, scale-up Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions, and enhance workforce capacities for large-scale delivery of ECD interventions.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The technical meeting will bring together up to 80 participants from eight countries: Botswana, Burundi, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda. The intention is to start and learn with these initial eight countries to inform subsequent convenings throughout the region. The country delegations will comprise representatives from Ministries of Health, staff from WHO and UNICEF, and key partners.

For each country, it is recommended to have three to four participants from the Ministry of Health (e.g., maternal health, newborn health, child health, IMCI, nutrition, PHC), the child health or nutrition focal person for WHO, the health or nutrition specialist for UNICEF, and, if applicable, a key partner who can support the government to take the agenda forward (e.g., civil society, academic institution, professional association). The total size of each country delegation should not exceed seven participants.

Representatives among regional and global partners will be identified by the organizing team. They will comprise of partners who have a footprint in multiple participating countries and whose contribution can enhance the enabling environment for strengthened services or support capacity building of the meeting participants in the future. They could include networks, governmental bodies, professional associations, academic institutions or funders.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

The Technical Meeting will take place from 25 to 28 February, 2025 in Nairobi, Kenya.

Participants should plan their travel to be able to attend the full 3.5 days of the meeting (e.g., arrive on Monday 24 February and leave Friday 28 February evening).

Please see the administrative and logistics note for further guidance.

For more information, please contact Oliver Petrovic (opetrovic@unicef.org) and Janet Kayita (kayitaj@who.int).