



The 7th April sees the celebration of World Health Day. It's the annual day to mark the anniversary of the founding of the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1948. WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. Lawyers have an active role in ensuring that the WHO remains viable and continues to be recognized.

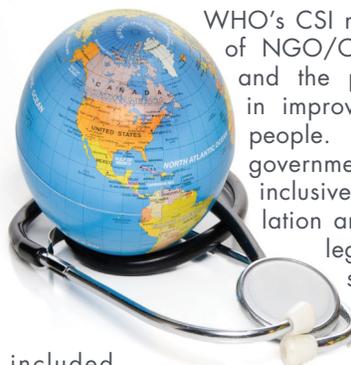
This year also sees the 35th anniversary of the Alma Ata Conference and Declaration which mobilized a "Primary Health Care movement" of professionals and institutions, governments and civil society organizations, researchers and grassroots organizations that undertook to tackle the "politically, socially and economically unacceptable" health inequalities in all countries. The goal which member countries of WHO united under, as a result of the Declaration was 'Health for All'. This was the beginning of health being seen as a socio-economic issue and as a human right.



From WHO's perspective, health is a shared responsibility in the 21st century, no longer the domain of medical specialists, health work now involves, among others, lawyers, politicians, social scientists and ordinary people everywhere.

Equitable access to essential care is one of the key topics for WHO and much research has been done on the vital part that Civil Society Organisations (CSO's) play in determining the course of public health today. Our firm can point to the support given to the work of organisations such as Fenway Health in Boston as an example of the role lawyers can play; an organisation that came into being as a direct result of community need and a perceived lack of provision. Fenway Health was motivated by a belief that healthcare is a right, not a privilege. As a result of such efforts, led by lawyers and others, more prominence has been given to civil society roles in raising, advancing and claiming the entitlements of different social groups. The complexity of development needs, declining resources, declining aid and various structural adjustment policies and global political changes have also contributed to declining service provision by the state. The gap has been increasingly filled by CSO's. In many cases CSO's provide cover to groups otherwise disadvantaged in health service access.

CSO's draw from diverse cultures, communities and neighbourhoods, work, social and other connections. Major emphasis is placed on the partnerships, communication and outreach that these Organisations can achieve. WHO created The Civil Society Initiative (CSI) in 2001 to recognise these interactions and provide a glimpse of how partnerships with civil society can yield tangible public health benefits for all. State-civil interactions have a long history in public health globally, for example the early public health actions to clean up American cities in the 1800s which were led by well known public figures supported by women's' groups. They are similar partnerships to those that positively impact the Rule of Law throughout the world.



WHO's CSI report examined a range of NGO/CSO resources in Africa and the part they were playing in improving the health of local people. It concluded that where governments and NGO's worked inclusively on policies and legislation and the setting up of new legal and administrative structures, successful outcomes were far more likely. The review included a call to all governments to ensure equal access to community-based services and facilities such as housing, schools and colleges, public buildings and transport systems and recommendations for comprehensive mandatory anti-discrimination laws. Public health was shown to be the winner when the collaborations between WHO and civil society were based on trust and respect. Tenets that our firm recognises and celebrates as part of teamwork and diversity.

WHO's support of CSO's and the provision of the legal authority for public participation in health provision all underlines the enhanced prospects for civic education and the building and strengthening of social capital, which has to be a good thing for all the communities in which we live and work.

Visit Diversity.edwardswildman.com for more information and a copy of this fact sheet.

The heart of Edwards Wildman Palmer LLP lies within our people and the many different experiences and perspectives we share. We recognize, embrace and celebrate our differences and believe we can only provide our clients with the best possible representation if we reflect the diversity of the clients and communities we serve.