

PL 2

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS AND HEALTH SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

| BACKGROUND

Global demographic transitions—including aging populations and declining fertility rates, youth bulges, and complex migration patterns—pose significant challenges to health systems worldwide[1],2. These will result in structural changes with around 55 per cent of the world’s population living in towns and cities, projected to be 70 per cent by 2050[2]. However, changing demographics will impact health systems if we do not prepare; for example, countries with the most increase in non-communicable diseases, are least prepared to address in terms of their health systems[3]. Investing in health systems will be critical to tackle these challenges[4]. Key issues on demographic transitions relate to changing disease burden, healthcare infrastructure and access, aging population and long-term care, workforce and economic impact, maternal and child health, health policy and financing and technological advancements. In addition, there is a need to think of a life course approach to health and well-being and how health systems can be designed for this purpose[5]. Overall, there is therefore a need for a holistic approach to adapt health systems to respond to the shifts in demographics.

[1] PMAC 2026 overarching concept note: 1. PMAC2026 Concept Note as of 24 Jan (1).pdf

[2] Shifting Demographics | United Nations

[3] The Changing Demographics of Global Health

[4] Global health 2035: a world converging within a generation - The Lancet

[5] The life-course approach: from theory to practice: case stories from two small countries in Europe

| OBJECTIVES

The objective of this plenary is to highlight the imperative for inclusive and sustainable health systems that are resilient to shifting demographics, recognising the need for multi-sectoral, life-course approaches in the context of current global developments, to improve population health and well-being.



Speaker

Jimmy Volmink

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Dr Jimmy Volmink serves as the Executive Director for Equity Wellcome, where he champions the vision to create a healthier future for everyone through transformative research, leadership and innovation for Health Equity.

Jimmy holds prominent roles within health research; he is an Emeritus Professor of Global Health and former Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at Stellenbosch University, South Africa. Throughout his career, his international contributions have included advancing evidence-based healthcare, addressing health and social inequalities, strengthening research capacity, and shaping leadership in health sciences education.

Jimmy's impactful research has made significant global contributions to health policy and practice, particularly within the fields of tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and cardiovascular disease interventions. He earned his medical degree from the University of Cape Town, a Master of Public Health from Harvard University, and a Doctor of Philosophy in Epidemiology from the University of Oxford. His work spans clinical research, health equity and global health governance, as well as a lifelong dedication to equitable and inclusive research ecosystems.

He is recognised by numerous accolades including the Leverhulme Medal for Distinguished Contribution from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians (Edinburgh), Member of the Academy of Science of South Africa, and recipient of a President's Lifetime Achievement Award from the South African Medical Research Council. Jimmy has also received a Lifetime Chancellor's Award for sustained excellence from Stellenbosch University.

Jimmy holds two honorary doctorates: a Doctor Honoris Causa from KU Leuven, Belgium in recognition of his work to promote human dignity and his contribution to science and practice to improve health and well-being, and a Doctor of Science, honoris causa from McMaster University, Canada, for his pioneering work in Evidence-Based Medicine.