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## Awards for Outstanding Public Health Contributions Presented at 77th World Health Assembly



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During a special ceremony at the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly in Geneva on Friday, 31 May 2024, awards will be presented to persons and institutions from around the world for their outstanding contributions to public health.

Eight winners will be awarded by the 77th World Health Assembly President, Dr Edwin Dikoloti of Botswana, together with high-level representatives of the foundations providing the public health awards and prizes and Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, as Administrator for the prizes.

The call for nominations of candidates for each prize is sent out each year after closure of the World Health Assembly. Nominations can be made by national health administrations of a WHO Member State and by former recipients of the prizes. At its 154th session in January 2024, the Executive Board designated the 2024 winners of the prizes, on the basis of proposals made by the dedicated selection panel for each prize.

The eight laureates have been selected to celebrate their unique role and contribution for public health in their countries and globally. They come from four WHO Regions – for Africa, the Eastern-Mediterranean, South-East Asia and the Western Pacific.

### Winners of the 2024 prizes

#### Dr LEE Jong-wook Memorial Prize for Public Health

##### 2024 laureate: Dr Bader Al-Rawahi, Oman

Dr Bader Al-Rawahi leads a major public health programme as Director of Communicable Diseases and Control, and Manager of the Expanded Programme of Immunization, at the Ministry of Health of Oman. The high quality of immunization services provided in the country is widely recognized internationally. Dr Al-Rawahi has kept abreast of new scientific, programmatic and policy developments to provide communities with a highly performing immunization programme and to achieve significant major health results. Dr Al-Rawahi has made a considerable effort to leave no one behind, including migrants, displaced populations and underprivileged persons. For example, during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, he ensured that COVID-19 vaccines were available to everyone in Oman, regardless of their registration status, achieving coverage of 94%. He also supports other countries in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, advising and assisting immunization programmes in war-torn countries and demonstrating his compassion when times are difficult. He has also served as an expert on several international public health committees, in support of vaccine product development and tuberculosis vaccines.

#### Sasakawa Health Prize

##### 2024 laureate: Dr Doreen Ramogola-Masire, Botswana

As a Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Enterprise, at the University of Botswana, Dr Ramogola-Masire has played an important role in the development and implementation of the first National Cervical Cancer Prevention Strategy. During her service as a member of the National HIV Technical Working Group for the past two decades, she proactively worked for developing and updating the National Strategic Framework for HIV. She worked to expand the partnerships to support the country's HIV/AIDS programme to also support cervical cancer prevention. Moreover, she has facilitated the development of an obstetrics and gynaecology specialization programme at the national level, which ensures a pool of well-trained specialists able to lead this work in the future. Dr Masire's involvement of community and traditional leaders at key stages of the preparation for the programme's launch is an important factor in ensuring the programme's success. She facilitates and builds capacity for collaborative and impactful multidisciplinary health research, with the inclusion of

the impact of climate change.

## **United Arab Emirates Health Foundation Prize**

### **2024 prize winner: the National Death Registry System, Saudi Arabia**

The National Death Registry System is a programme within the Ministry of Health of Saudi Arabia. Thanks to this system, the country is able to share its mortality data with WHO and can now identify regions with the highest mortality rates and prioritize the provision of medical support to those areas. The data collected through this system inform national health policies and resource allocation within the health system. Recognizing the need to adapt to the continuing digital transformation and automation, Saudi Arabia prioritized the digitization and automation of its mortality data registry. As a result, a dynamic and regularly updated electronic death registry facilitates easy access to the data and ensures transparency and integration with multiple national agencies. Stakeholders and communities within the system provide feedback continuously, and in parallel training registrars, doctors and coders has significantly improved data quality within the Birth and death registration systems are the foundation of national health policies and systems for primary health care and leaving no one behind. The system can serve as a model for other countries.

## **His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah Prize for Research in Health Care for the Elderly and in Health Promotion**

### **The 2024 Prize was jointly awarded to the Chinese Geriatrics Society, China, and Dr Ahmed Hamed Saif Al Wahaibi, Oman**

The Chinese Geriatrics Society is a nongovernmental organization whose aim is to improve the health of 267 million older persons in China. The Society conducts a broad range of programmes and activities that are central to healthy ageing through a comprehensive approach that includes geriatric assessment, clinical treatment, nutritional support, rehabilitation and palliative care. It carries out innovative research on multimorbidity in older age and related biomarkers, and develops guidance and care models to support person-centred and integrated health services, dealing with issues such as access to palliative care. Results of this work include the development of local care standards on how to manage polypharmacy and hypertension among older persons with multimorbidity. These standards are applied nationwide, with training programmes reaching a range of personnel, including 4000 caregivers of older persons and over 140 000 geriatric physicians, enabling them to upgrade their skills. The Society has also pioneered the creation of standards for age-friendly hospitals. After piloting this work in 53 institutions, 90% of health care institutions in Beijing are now meeting these standards. The Society also works to strengthen the collaboration between those involved in academia, research and industry.

Dr Ahmed Hamed Saif Al Wahaibi is a family physician who has made an important contribution to integrating high-quality care of older people within primary health care in Oman. Most recently, he has been leading the Elderly Care Section in the Primary Health Care Department of the Ministry of Health. He has contributed to the development of a national programme for older persons that provides screening, assessment and early interventions as part of primary health care for people aged 60 years and older. The programme aims to prevent diseases, provide continuity of care from health care settings to patients' homes, maximize independence and enable older persons to have access to community resources. Building on this work, Dr Al Wahaibi has helped to develop an electronic health record system, used by a multidisciplinary team, which includes the assessment findings regarding the health status of older persons, and links these findings with the support services available within primary health care. He works to strengthen the capacity of nurses to carry out these assessments and to engage local communities in the planning, management and evaluation of the primary health care services available for older people.

## **Nelson Mandela Award for Health Promotion**

### **The 2024 award was jointly bestowed to Professor Bontle Mbongwe, Botswana and the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), India**

The National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) in Bangalore, India delivers state-of-the-art clinical care, carrying out training and research as well as involving the communities it serves. It collaborates with central and state governments in framing, informing and implementing national policies and strategies such as the National Mental Health Policy (2014), the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, and the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2022). NIMHANS involves young people as change agents within district youth-empowerment centres in order to bridge the gap between young people, their families and an ever-changing society (reaching about 6 million young people). In addition, it is engaged in a national initiative for child protection, mental health and psychosocial care (reaching more than 3 million people). Other major programmes led by the Institute include urban mental health and integrating mental health issues arising out of climate change into primary mental health care delivery, as well as training and accrediting community volunteers to deliver mental health first aid: 18 000 gatekeepers have been trained to facilitate the early identification of suicide risk and to intervene. NIMHANS has initiated numerous digital technology initiatives, including: the Digital Academy, whose courses have been followed by 2500 health care providers. A national helpline for psychosocial support and mental health services was launched during the first wave of COVID-19. In 2022, the Institute established the National Tele Mental Health Programme to provide equitable, affordable and high-quality mental health care across all Indian States.

Professor Bontle Mbongwe from Botswana is a renowned public health advocate and a passionate tobacco control activist. Through country-level consultations that she initiated during the negotiation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, Botswana's Control of Smoking Act, 1992, was amended in 2004 to restrict smoking in public places to protect children, pregnant women and workers, raise the minimum-age restrictions for selling tobacco products, prohibiting their sale to persons under 18 years and ban tobacco advertising and promotion. In 2008, Professor Mbongwe's research contributed to influencing government policies away from the use of mercury-containing devices in health care facilities towards mercury-free alternatives. In 2014, she boldly challenged the tobacco industry by successfully advocating for the introduction of a 30% tobacco levy in Botswana. She then contributed to the country's Tobacco Control Act, 2021. Her relentless work helped raising of the minimum-age restriction for selling tobacco products, prohibiting their sale to persons under 21 years, banning the sale of

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single sticks of cigarettes as well as requiring tobacco products to be sold by licensed persons only. She established the first civil society Anti-Tobacco Network in Botswana and plays an important role in building a network of media and nongovernmental organizations committed to tobacco control in her home country as well as in the rest of Africa and beyond.

## **Ihsan Dođramacı Family Health Foundation Prize**

### **The 2024 winner: Dr Jamila Taiseer Yasser Al Abri, Oman**

Dr Al Abri is a renowned obstetrician-gynaecologist in Oman with extensive experience and leadership in women's health. She is currently the Director of the Department of Woman and Child Health in Oman. She has worked extensively in the field of family health, including: community health; mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis; human papillomavirus; HIV and management of a variety of communicable diseases; maternal health and prevention of maternal mortality; and newborn, child and adolescent health at primary care and tertiary care levels. Dr Al Abri has demonstrated significant leadership in teaching and managing national health programmes, including on breast cancer, mental health and autism spectrum disorders, and other family health issues. She has played an important role in contributing to the strategic plans for women's and children's health as part of Oman's long-term vision, Health Vision 2050. She has authored numerous scientific publications and has received several national and international awards and fellowships. Dr Al Abri has helped to guide the work of various organizations and their technical committees as an adviser, for the region and beyond. This has included leading a technical assistance project to enhance social protection for health care of women in Arab States, which was implemented in six countries, and collaborating with WHO on the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

**Source & Image Credit:** [WHO](#)

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