17 November 2016 I Vancouver – The Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (AHPSR) calls for participatory leadership to strengthen health systems. The approach is premised on inclusivity and engages diverse stakeholders at different levels within and outside the health system.

The report, *Open Mindsets; Participatory Leadership for Health*, was launched at the Fourth Global Symposium on Health Systems Research, being held from 14-18 November in Vancouver, Canada, along with a special issue on "
Effective Leadership for Health Systems
" in the Health Systems & Reform Journal.

Executive Director for the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research (AHPSR), Dr Abdul Ghaffar said, "As we advance into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) era, it becomes increasingly clear that traditional individualistic and hierarchical leadership approaches are out of date and ineffectual."

Dr Ghaffar added: "The Ebola crisis in West Africa underscored the urgent need to strengthen health systems. It also revealed the need for multi-disciplinary approaches for participatory leadership. Any leader's ability to bring about change ultimately depends on their ability to mobilize support from a range of leaders and actors at regional and district levels."

The flaghship report is a culmination of two years of research based on surveys from 65 countries, including interviews with more than 20 prominent health leaders from mostly low and middle-income countries.

It is grounded in two important principles:

1. the performance of a health system is measured by not only outcomes (e.g. improved health), but also values (equity in health outcomes, appropriateness of services and care).

2. health is no longer the exclusive domain of only clinical providers, but now relies on a wide range of actors from different disciplines.

The report highlights the role of civil society, citing for example, anti-tobacco lobbyists and researchers whose efforts saw the adoption of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), and the activists who helped drive progress against AIDS. It notes the influence of the media, and high-level figures from outside the health sphere. It points out that the eradication of

smallpox and the success in combating polio are largely due to participatory leadership with many groups representing diverse interests and sectors coming together and brought about lasting change.

The report aims to stimulate debate and further research on the nature of effective leadership in health systems and the potential role of participatory forms of leadership as a pathway for more effective and equitable health systems.

The special issue in the Health Systems & Reform Journal complements this report and provides suggestions for inculcating participatory leadership in the health sector through, for instance, creating platforms for collective engagement and/or developing training courses. It also notes that a participatory leadership approach can make the health system far less vulnerable to changes brought on by staff turnovers and other events.

Adaptive and participatory forms of leadership for health systems will be key to realizing the SDGs.

The Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research is a partnership within the World Health Organization (WHO). The Alliance is a recognized global convener of national policy-makers, civil-society organizations and other important actors. It will continue to work collaboratively with global and regional partners to support research for enhancing participatory leadership at different levels in the health system.

Access the full reports below:
Open Mindsets; Participatory Leadership for Health
Special issue on “Effective Leadership for Health Systems” in the Health Systems & Reform Journal.