

Opening Plenary & Welcome Remarks

This session marked the opening of HBSC's 30th Anniversary Conference which brought together more than 230 delegates, who travelled to St Andrews from over 45 different countries. In addition to the welcoming remarks, delegates were treated to a short review of why, where and how the HBSC study was started, 30 years ago, as a result of a single conversation stretched across a series of restaurants in Venice. [For the full story see here.](#)

Key points

- In an era of soundbite science with consistently short-term research horizons, HBSC offers something incredibly valuable and provides what very few others can.
- Decision makers depend upon HBSC's data to inform the creation and implementation of policies that seek to improve the health and well-being of children and young people around the world.
- HBSC can continue to play a critical role in the future, helping countries and communities to avoid the crippling long-term yet avoidable costs of abandoned or badly supported adolescents.

Your research is important for a number of different reasons. Firstly, it provides an invaluable insight on a range of health and risk behaviours as perceived by children and young people at critical stages in their development and experience of the world. Secondly, it provides us with a barometer against which we can broadly measure the success of policies which aim to improve the health and well-being of Scotland's Young people. It also shows us where the challenges remain. Thirdly, the survey illustrates that adolescence is a unique and critical period with significant implications for future health outcomes. And finally, it allows us to compare ourselves with a wide range of other countries.

Aileen Campbell MSP

For the network this is a unique opportunity to debate and discuss important ideas and challenges and problems, that will help us to shape the future HBSC study.

Candace Currie



The economic impact of Non-Communicable Diseases amounts to many hundred billions of Euros or Pounds or Krone or whatever currency we calculate it in. Many of these costs are avoidable, through investing in health promotion and disease prevention at an early age. And we can use HBSC's data to try to convince those who make the decisions, policy-makers, that maybe there should be a greater investment.

Vivian Barnekow



Speakers Included:

Prof Hugh MacDougall - Dean of Medicine and Head of the Faculty of Medicine (Chair); Ms Aileen Campbell MSP - Scotland's Minister for Children and Young People; Mr Gerald McLaughlin - Chief Executive of NHS Health Scotland; [Vivian Barnekow](#) - Program manager for WHO Regional Office for Europe; Prof Lasse Kannas - Co-founder of HBSC study; and Prof Candace Currie OBE - HBSC International Co-ordinator and Director of CAHRU

Youth in HBSC

People are experts in their own lives and circumstances. We all have a duty to include children and young people in the discussions we have, the research we conduct, and the decisions we make which will shape their futures. This session, led by a group of 23 Youth Delegates from Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, was an illustration of the value and importance of engaging with young people.



Key points

Youth participants:

- Shared their experiences of working with the HBSC study in their own countries.
- Offered their reflections on, and reactions to, HBSC's data. Specifically, youth delegates discussed data relating to mental health, youth and adult relationships, and body image - taking part in question and answer sessions with audience members about these areas.
- Conducted some research of their own, by quizzing adult delegates about their experiences of, and thoughts about, youth engagement.
- Began to develop their vision for how young people can become more involved with HBSC.

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If you don't ask the risky questions, then you don't really know the mind of a teenager.
Reece Kelly

I would share with adults that it's good to have our voice heard, and they should listen to and respect our opinions.
Michelle Burnage

When people are growing up in teenage-hood, they are treated like children but expected to act like adults.
Cliona Brady

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Questions from adults, answers from young people:

Q: You talked a lot about body image, but don't you think obesity is a bigger problem?

A: In terms of health repercussions then yes, but a negative body image can affect a person deeply and have lasting repercussions on mental health, which in return can affect physical health.

Q: Could you define mental health in one sentence?

A: How you perceive yourself and things around you.

Q: To what extent is social media replacing face to face contact with friends?

A: Yes, a lot of online communication is replacing face to face interaction. But we say that there is really nothing wrong with that, until you begin to lose out on some of the important social skills that are involved in face to face interactions: like understanding people's emotions and the connotations of what they say, and having that face to face intimacy between two people interacting.

Q: What advice might you give us around how we might strengthen young people's resilience to deal with cyber bullying?

A: One really big message we need to educate people about is how to use the internet productively. So how to use it respectfully, how to use it well... We need to emphasise the importance of behaviour on the internet and how it can affect people in the long term.

A: I would say it's important to really engage all of the stakeholders who have a role to play within technology, such as parents, the educators, the social networking industry - so that we can move towards a more positive environment. To have the systems in place so that victims have the opportunity to be heard and be supported, and minimise the risks.

Q: Why is it easier for young people to talk to their mothers than their fathers?

A: I've always found it easier to talk to my mum because my dad always wants to fix it, and take it out of my hands; whereas my mum listens and tries to help me come to a solution.

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I was amazed by the work you guys are doing in different countries. The way you want to be heard, the way you want to be respected. And I think there are a lot of perspectives that we need to learn from you in order to do better research.
Zuzana Dankulinkova

I think you made the point very clearly that if you want to get young people's perspectives, and you want to do research that is relevant to young people, who better to ask than the young people themselves?
Fergus Neville

The thing I most took away from the youth engagement piece was just the extent to which kids are really interested in being part of the conversation.
Sara Johnson

If you trust young people to make informed contributions, then they won't let you down.
Tam Baillie

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[Click to watch our Youth Report video](#)



Other Resources:

HBSC Wales' Youth Delegates wrote a blog piece on their experiences at the HBSC conference for [DECHIPer](#). Check it out [here](#). HBSC Scotland's Youth Delegates produced a [video report](#) documenting their preparation in the run-up to the event.

[Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People's 7 Golden Rules for Youth Participation](#) are a set of principles designed to help anyone working with, and for, children and young people. If you are looking to start engaging with young people you should download a copy of SCCYP's Participation Report entitled [Children and Young People's Views on Participation and Principles for Practice](#).

[The Students' Commission of Canada](#) have been working with the Canadian HBSC Youth Action Group to develop recommendations and resources for the Public Health Agency of Canada. These include: [Our Messages](#), a series of videos that share the findings of HBSC Canada's national report, produced by young people for young people. A [Theoretical Toolkit](#) that provides a model for engaging youth in evidence informed policy and programme development. As well as [a series of workshops and activities](#) for discussing issues raised by HBSC Canada's research with young people.

HBSC partners [Wikichild](#) published a piece on the [Wikiprogress Blog](#) entitled [Yes Malala, We're Listening - Youth Participation](#) which looks back on the HBSC conference and outlines three necessary steps to increase youth participation: listening, involvement in decision-making and involvement in implementation.

Youth Delegates from:

- **Canada:** Trevor Sookraj, Kristine Parker, Kalheel Rawanji, Jonathon Jenkins
- **England:** Maddie Bean, Holly Brooks, Kathryn Evans, Claudia McPhail, Sophie Diec, Aminah Ramzan
- **Ireland:** Eva O'Callaghan, Rachel Fox, Darog Smith, Austin McGuinn, Aaron Murphy, Cliona Brady
- **Scotland:** Michelle Burnage, Reece Kelly, Blair Flight
- **Wales:** Luke Brace, Shelby Jones, Sophie Jones, Oliver Sanders

Introduction and session facilitation:

- **Opening remarks:** Tam Baillie - Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People
- **Facilitation:** Laura Hamilton and Iain Shaw - Media Education, Stoney McCart - The Students Commission

Towards a Transdisciplinary Approach to Adolescent Health:

advancing the scientific impact of the HBSC study

HBSC was designed to be cross-disciplinary, and to consider health as something which included physical, mental and social dimensions of well-being; rather than simply the absence of disease. 30 years on, this session considered what new knowledge and approaches could be drawn upon to enrich HBSC's scientific endeavour to explore and understand adolescent health and well-being.

Key questions

- Are we pushing at enough frontiers? Should we ask more risky and controversial questions to get at the richest and most rewarding areas of science?
- Can we take HBSC from being a static to a dynamic and more frequent or continuous survey tool?
- Can we develop a more holistic understanding of adolescent health and well-being by including a component of spirituality? Which questions would best be able to capture valuable information about children's purpose and identity, connectedness to community, connectedness to their environment, and connectedness beyond the self (e.g. meditation or prayer)?
- Which new sources of data would prove valuable avenues for analysis as we seek to develop a more advanced understanding of what shapes the health of the world's young people. Genetic or hormonal information? Saliva samples? Blood pressure data...?

Speakers included:

Prof Pernille Due (Chair); Prof Adj't Leif Aaro - [Presentation of original concept of HBSC](#); Asst Prof Sara Johnson - [Stress, adolescent brain development and risk behaviours](#); Dr Silvia Paracchini - [Genetic epidemiology, what can we learn?](#); Prof Will Pickett and Kristine Parker - [Holistic conceptualisation of adolescent health with the addition of spirituality](#); Dr Jane Hartley - [Yoga goes to school](#).



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What new disciplines and disciplinary perspectives should be trying to weave into [the study]? Perhaps not necessarily all into the questionnaire but perhaps in supplementary data or sources of data?
Candace Currie

Countries who involve themselves in the HBSC study should not limit themselves to only carry out data collection based on the HBSC instrument. Our hope was that, at least in some countries, there would be spin-off studies. There would be researchers interested in doing panel studies to really understand processes that take place over time... We also would have liked to see intervention studies... and of course we were fully aware that doing simple cross national surveys, without really doing in depth studies with interviews and qualitative approaches, would also be a limitation, so we had the idea that cross sectional health behavioural surveys would be a starting point, but we hoped that more would come after this.
Leif Aaro

The late development of the human brain is also a huge opportunity, it allows us to be tremendously flexible in response to our environment... it also means that adolescents have a much more nimble approach to cognition and behaviour than they might at other times in their life course.
Sara Johnson
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Wikichild, WHO Euro & HBSC Online Discussion Launch

In this lunchtime session HBSC, WHO Euro and Wikichild came together to launch an open public online discussion, entitled "how should child well-being be defined and measured in view of future development frameworks". This discussion ran for 2 weeks, gathering over 50 individual comments.



Key points

- These online discussions present an opportunity to share ideas, opinions and expertise about child well-being worldwide - connecting a wide range of contributors and giving the chance to engage with new, energised and diverse audiences.
- HBSC and Wikichild have previously partnered on another online discussion entitled: "The impact of discriminatory social norms on adolescent girls". For an overview see the discussion's synthesis report.
- Wikichild is a global online resource for research and advocacy. It provides an open platform to share information, ideas and materials relating to child well-being. The Wikichild website has more information about how you can get involved as well as what you gain by contributing.



[Click here for the discussion synthesis report](#)

Speakers included:
Joseph Hancock - HBSC Research Communications Officer; Robbie Lawrence - Wikichild Consultant; and Salema Gulbahar - Wikiprogress Coordinator

Data Visualisation Taster

This lunchtime session was designed to give delegates a glimpse of new and engaging ways to communicate their research findings and visualize data. Presenting information in creative ways allows you to see new patterns and explore questions that you wouldn't otherwise know to ask!



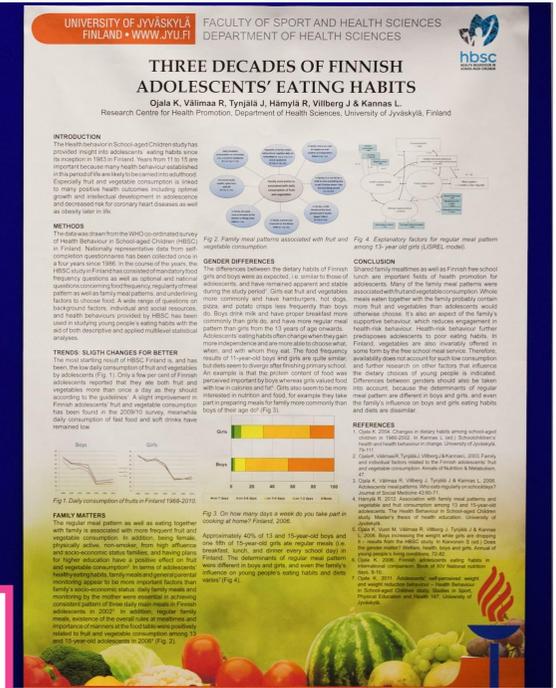
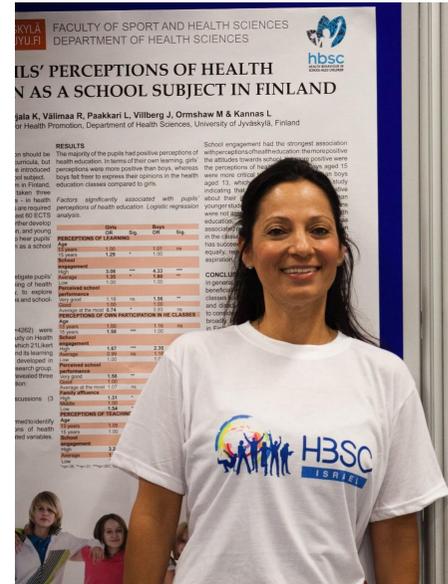
Key points

- Data visualisation can make your research more accessible and can help you to quickly communicate complex ideas in a simple way. This is especially true online, where you can engage a global audience of web-surfers like never before.
- Tableau Public, a free software package, was showcased during this session - with the packed room of attendees shown how to take an excel file and turn it into an interactive data dashboard and publish it on the internet, within 30 minutes.
- The team at HBSC's International Coordinating Centre are exploring ways that our data can be made more accessible, interactive and engaging. If you want to discuss this and find out more about ongoing projects, please contact : joseph.hancock@hbsc.org.

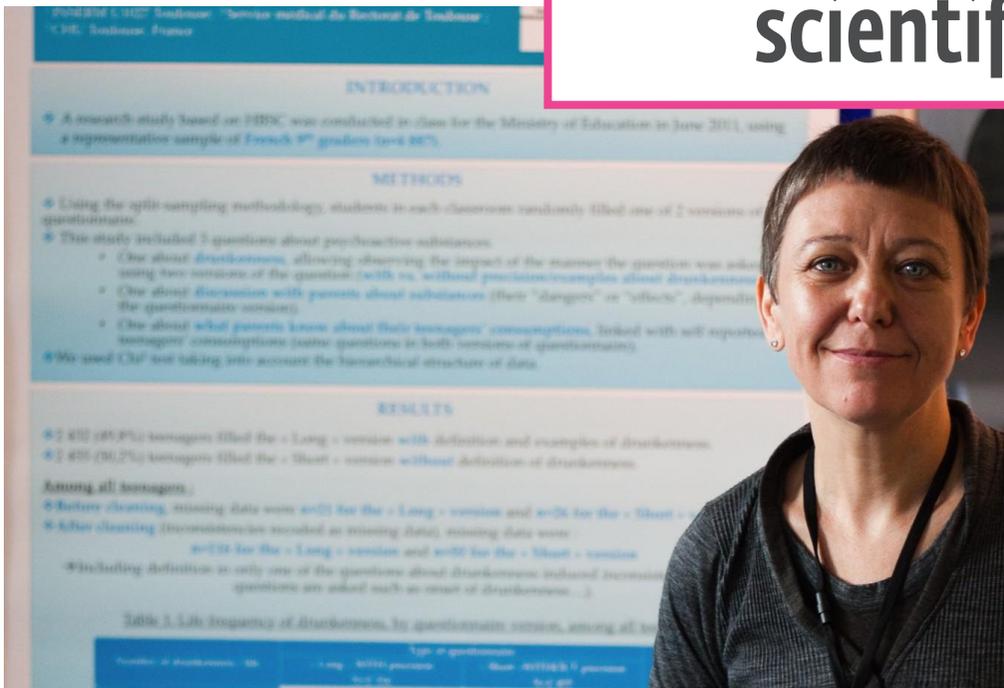


[Click here to view the visualisation](#)

Speaker:
Maxime Marboeuf - Tableau Data Analyst



Click here to view the scientific posters



HBSC Beyond Europe and North America

This session documented the development of HBSC beyond Europe and North America, reviewing the ways in which the study has been adapted and made applicable to a wide range of contexts. Participants reflected on the challenges and opportunities that this brings, and how different research teams have approached these.

Key questions

- Are the kind of problems within adolescent health that HBSC has traditionally been focused on still purely problems of the high income world? For example, the top 5 countries for overweight females (13-15) are: Tonga, United Arab Emirates, Malta, The United States and Mauritania.
- How can we more effectively harmonise across surveys and better relate the work of HBSC to other data collection efforts around the globe?
- How can data collection efforts allow comparability, between hemispheres, while still remaining flexible and sensitive to different cultural norms and value systems?
- Should there be a draft model/protocol for implementation of the HBSC survey to fit new countries and national contexts?

“ Many of the challenges relate to the cultural translation and ecological relevance of the questions. It is not exactly ‘What are the questions?’ It is ‘What are the concepts?’... ‘What is a family? What is a house? What is physical activity?’

Margarida Gaspar de Matos

There is a need for political support and political commitment to work after the survey, because the survey is not a goal, the survey is a tool... It is a tool for improving the country.

What will be the next step to make HBSC the world standard?

Goof Buijs

I think that probably it’s not about one brand being the dominant brand but it’s about lining the brands up so that we are working to the common good... They might actually measure different things, and that’s not actually a bad idea if they do, but they need to complement each other.

George Patton

By seeing all those different ways to ask the questions and understand how they are relevant or not for different kids, it gives me insight for different kids in my own country.

Emmanuelle Godeau



Speakers Included:

George Patton: [Emerging Global Perspectives on the Health and Development of Adolescents](#); Goran Holmqvist: [UNICEF - Messages From the Demand Side](#); Margarida Gaspar de Matos: [HBSC in Portuguese speaking countries \(Brazil, Angola, Cape Verde\)](#); Sisko Honkala: [Health Behaviour of School-aged Children in Kuwait](#); Sophia Lin: [The application of WHO Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children \(HBSC\) survey in Taiwan: challenges and opportunities](#); Mei Wang: [The HBSC Linked Project in China: Background, Development and Future Challenges](#); Mr Ashyr Atayev (Deputy Minister of Health and Medical Industry of Turkmenistan), Azat Atajanov (UNFPA) and Sergey Sargsyan (HSBC Armenia): [Pilot HBSC study in Turkmenistan 2011 - 2012: lessons learnt](#).



Making a Difference: HBSC Research Data into Policy Action

A provocative session which reflected on the duty of scientists to play a part within the policy-making process. This session catalysed discussions about how HBSC could adapt so as to allow its data, members and analyses to play a larger role in supporting decision-makers in the future.

Key questions

- What is the point and purpose of HBSC if it is not to influence policy and practice?
- In what ways should we seek to exert influence? For example, should we be trying to line HBSC up with advocacy groups; or should we interact with policy makers more explicitly and more often, providing interpretations and policy recommendations directly?
- For evidence to be able to inform policy: it has to be available when it is needed, it needs to be communicated in a way that compliments the political mood, and it has to suggest an action. How do we as researchers make sure that we have timely, relevant information ready to provide answers to the decision-makers when they ask us "So what should I do?"
- Synthesising, packaging and communicating our data and collective expertise in a way that meets the needs of decision-makers does not come without a cost. It is an expensive, specialist and time consuming process. So how are we going to meet these costs?
- As a large scale, population-based, multinational, regularly repeating survey, is the network making the most out of the available opportunities to learn from natural experiments? Can we more explicitly draw connections between policy changes and impacts?

Speakers included:

Prof Peter Donnelly - HBSC Scotland (Chair); Dr Antony Morgan - HBSC England and Associate Director in the Centre for Public Health Excellence; Dominic Richardson - Policy Analyst for the OECD; and Prof Susan Sawyer - Director of the Centre for Adolescent Health, Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

If all we do is show them a league table of variations in data and are not ready to answer the obvious follow on questions, which are: Why does it look like that? Why is this happening? What should we do about it....? Then, we are probably missing a trick.

Peter Donnelly

HBSC is unique. Really unique. There are so many things that policy makers can do with your data that they can't do with anything else. I think that there is an ethical obligation to engage with policy... there is an obligation, I think, for HBSC to apply what it knows.

Dominic Richardson

We really need to be engaging, as a field, in establishing a transformative narrative about why adolescence matters... Overwhelmingly, we need to find a narrative that we can sign up for, share a common language around, to influence and convince policy makers that this life stage matters. I believe that it is only then that we can build the traction from the data that we have available.

Susan Sawyer

Very few politicians read scientific journals... One of the most important products of the HBSC study is people, good people, who can communicate.

Leif Edvard Aaro

One of the things I think that we as scientists can contribute to... is to gather more information about the characteristics of the policies in different countries... and link that information to the information that we gather out of the data. We could then be able to come forward with some insights about: why certain countries are doing better than other countries, or to what extent are certain policies doing better than other policies.

Yossi Harel-Fisch

How do we organise ourselves in a way that can allow us to do more with the ideas that have been generated over the last few years? These are being done in individual countries - I suppose what I am saying is how do we do that at an international level? There's a gap at the international level - it's the capacity, training and systems needed in order to bring this about.

Antony Morgan

Closing Plenary: Where Would the World Be Without HBSC?

This session saw a team of HBSC members - some new recruits and some more experienced - come together to reflect on some of the principal achievements and critical contributions that HBSC has made to research, policy and practice - and ultimately to the lives of young people - around the world.

Key points

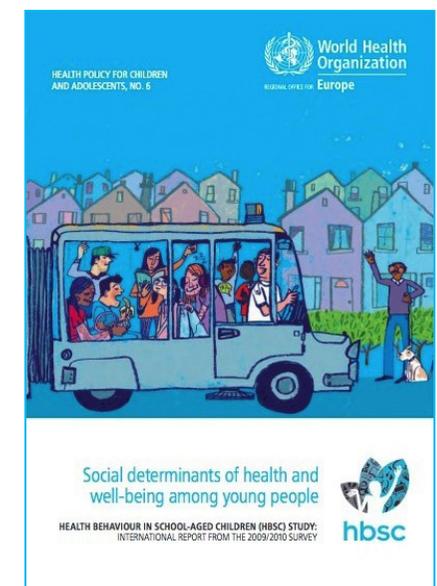
- 30 years ago, the creation of HBSC brought epidemiologists and public health experts together with behavioural and social psychologists. Necessitating the development of ways of working that not only allowed, but actively encouraged, the cross-pollination of a diverse range of perspectives.
- HBSC's members have developed a broad range of trusted indicators, specifically for children, that help us to understand the determinants of health and population level health outcomes, at the same time as gathering information about the social, economic and environmental contexts of health and well-being cross-nationally.
- HBSC's historical data set and cross national comparisons allow us to learn from the natural policy experiments that continually take place across Europe and North America. We can look at the data we have and begin to think about why country A experienced condition Z when country B experienced condition Y. These opportunities to deepen our understanding of the forces acting upon child health are immensely valuable.
- HBSC has helped to build capacity within many, many countries by providing tools, sharing expertise, through developing the abilities of local researchers, and by generating local data that can be compared against an international backdrop.

Speakers included:

Kalheel Rawanji, Youth Delegate from HBSC Canada (Chair); John Freeman, HBSC Canada (co-Chair); Ross Whitehead, HBSC Scotland; Anna Matochkina, HBSC Russia; Bente Wold, HBSC Norway and co-founder of the study; Don Nutbeam, Former HBSC England; and Yossi Harrel Fitch, HBSC Israel

Key questions

- How can we use the knowledge and expertise that we have acquired over the last 30 years to help support and provide guidance to new and developing networks?
- How can we ensure that HBSC continues to add to its many successes and capitalise on the impressive achievements that have been made so far? Faced with extreme funding pressures and at a time when the world of international research is changing dramatically?
- The HBSC network includes more than 450 researchers and spans 39 different countries, these numbers get even larger when you include the wider family of linked projects and partner organisations. Ensuring the smooth running and continued development of HBSC's operations requires a great deal of co-ordination - so how do we sustain the study at an international level? Is there a new, sophisticated model we can adopt?



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HBSC has a quality which can hardly be overestimated. We need the HBSC survey right now, and we will need it in the future.

Andreas Kloeke

Without the HBSC in Greenland, scientific knowledge on adolescent health and health behaviour would actually be non-existent.

Christina Schnoor

In fact without HBSC I doubt that there would be any similar international system at all. Finally, we would not have such a strong and extensive network of researchers and professionals with very important links to policy makers and practitioners. To me, such a network in itself holds the greatest potential to reach the aim of improving health and well-being among young people.

Bente Wold

We are managing to change the whole culture of using evidence when making policies. That is a very nice thing to see.

Yossi Harel-Fish

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When you collaborate this way. You learn so much about your own country. I think we have probably all had that experience. It is by studying other countries and by seeing how different or similar your own country is, that you really get to understand things much better.

Bente Wold

I think that HBSC, and social science research in general, is helping society to become wiser. And a wiser society is also a healthier and happier society.

Michela Lenzi

One theme that I really heard come out of this, is that within the HBSC, there is a lot of diversity of different ideas, different cultures, and different methods. All of us can really benefit from that diversity and use these differences to the benefit of all of us.

Kalheel Rawanji

We work very much on a voluntary basis. There is an enormous number of people who just give of their time. That has been ok so far but, actually, we are getting quite stretched. Because most people are being quite highly pressurised in their own jobs and so they have less time to give. We can't rely totally on volunteerism.

Candace Currie

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Closing Remarks

First and foremost, thank you to all of those who attended for bringing the warmth, enthusiasm and laughter that made HBSC's 30th Anniversary Conference such a success and joy to be a part of.

This event would not have been possible without the dedication and hard work of all those who gave their time to help plan and prepare for this meeting. In particular, great credit is due to St Andrews School of Medicine and Biological Sciences, and the Child and Adolescent Health Research Unit for being such gracious and welcoming hosts.

Special Thanks to:

- World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe
- Media Education
- NHS Health Scotland
- University of St Andrews Conference and Group Services

Photo credits: Ben Goulter

[Click here](#) to see view the full photo gallery online.

Report produced by:

HBSC 's International Coordinating Centre



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Conference feedback:

Great and rich conference, excellent organisation, creative, democratic, for everyone's opinion place, with many ways and directions to go on ...

This HBSC meeting was one of the best of all, which I attended ever.

I enjoyed both scientific and social aspect of the meeting. By all means, it was an imposing 30th anniversary celebration.

Felt inspired after the St Andrews meeting - really felt it worked well done to the team

It was amazing! Thank you very much for all this excellent organisation and a fantastic HBSC meeting!!! More than great! (especially all the evening activities with the dinner/and great ideas)

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Cheers to the next 30 years!



