

SUMMARY OF WHA76.19

On May 29th, 2023, the World Health Assembly unanimously approved the micronutrient fortification resolution “Accelerating efforts for preventing micronutrient deficiencies and their consequences, including spina bifida and other neural tube defects, through safe and effective food fortification”. This resolution became decision WHA76.19.

The resolution, proposed by Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, European Union and its 27 Member States, Israel, Malaysia and Paraguay, recognizes micronutrient deficiencies as a risk factor for many diseases, leading to increasing morbidity and mortality rates. Deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals, specifically folate, iron, vitamin A, and zinc, are among the greatest global threats to human potential, affecting 50% of all preschool aged children and 67% of all women of reproductive age worldwide causing devastating birth defects, blindness, fragile immune systems, and death during childbirth.

Hidden hunger can be tackled through large scale food fortification (LSFF). LSFF adds essential vitamins and minerals to widely consumed items, such as wheat and maize flours, rice, cooking oil, and salt in accordance with national consumption patterns and deficiencies. Food fortification programs have a proven global record of success over the past 100 years.

Decision WHA76.19 requests the WHO Director General to provide guidance, standards, and technical support to Member States as they pursue the use of food fortification and other interventions to combat micronutrient malnutrition.

Some of the actions decision WHA76.19 urges Member States to consider are:

- Make decisions on food fortification with micronutrients on the basis of public health needs and carry out regular monitoring;
- Conduct dialogues among appropriate stakeholders on the importance of preventing micronutrient deficiencies and birth defects through healthy diets, food fortification, and/or supplementation policies, adequately designed and implemented;
- Build multisectoral collaborations across the public and private sectors and civil society to support implementation of policies to combat micronutrient deficiencies;
- Strengthen surveillance and national estimates of anaemia and neural tube defects to monitor progress towards prevention;
- Strengthen financing mechanisms and other enhancements for food fortification and/or supplementation programs to ensure quality implementation; capacity to monitor compliance, impact, and regular reporting of programme performance; coverage; quality; and evolution of micronutrient status including the consequences of intake, coverage and status;
- Share information through WHO on implementation of this resolution, to be included in the Director General's reports to the Health Assembly in 2026, 2028, and 2030.