

Economic downturn will have severe, far-reaching effects on global health

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The health of millions of people worldwide is at risk as a result of the financial crisis, says Dr Andrew Robertson, in an editorial published online in Emerging Health Threats Journal.

The world economy is currently in the midst of the most significant recession since the 1930s. The crisis has proved devastating for national economies, and the effects on [health](#) care will be felt worldwide as health spending falls, unemployment rises, and international aid is cut.

“Health care, already precarious in many developing countries, is likely to decline further as aid dries up and government expenditure falls, with millions more forced into poverty and malnutrition,” says Robertson, Director of Disaster Management, Regulation and Planning at the Department of Health for Western Australia, in the article. “The consequences have been seen before.”

Children, the disabled, and the elderly are likely to be worst hit, particularly in developing countries where poverty and malnutrition will increase demand for already strained health services. Women and girls may also disproportionately suffer. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 saw industries employing women affected first; and spending on women's health care fell, including antenatal and maternity services.

There are concerns that the financial crisis has already hit tuberculosis control, which has global ramifications, says Robertson.

“There are already indications that funding for TB diagnosis and management is decreasing in [developing countries](#) and a surge of new cases there may flow onto the US and other countries,” he says.

Healthcare in developed countries will also suffer if budgets are cut and incomes fall. Fewer people are accessing private health services in the USA, which will increase the burden on public health services.

Resources for disease surveillance are often cut back during difficult economic times, jeopardising the systems we rely on to identify and deal with emerging diseases - including the current swine flu epidemics.

The 1995 economic crisis in Mexico led to 27,000 excess deaths in that country alone - but the effect of this far greater, global downturn is currently “impossible to quantify,” according to Robertson.

Source: Emerging Health Threats Journal

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