

3 February 2023



Press release: WHA draft resolution “Accelerating efforts for preventing micronutrient deficiencies and their consequences, including spina bifida and other neural tube defects, through safe and effective food fortification”

On February 3 the World Health Organization Executive Board decided to recommend to the seventy-sixth World Health Assembly the adoption of the following draft resolution “[Accelerating efforts for preventing micronutrient deficiencies and their consequences, including spina bifida and other neural tube defects, through safe and effective food fortification](#)”.

The International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF) celebrates this important milestone towards reducing the prevalence of Spina Bifida and other Neural Tube Defects (NTDs) worldwide. IF has been at the forefront of the advocacy for large scale food fortification of staple foods with folic acid since evidence emerged regarding the important role folic acid (Vitamin B9) can have in reducing risks of NTDs. Decades of scientific evidence has categorically demonstrated that fortification is not only safe and feasible, but it is also the most effective policy to reduce the prevalence of Spina Bifida and other NTDs. An advocacy that has been achieved through partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders, including successful projects through private-public-civil initiatives, for example [Smarter Futures](#).

The draft decision adopted by the Executive Board is proposed and supported by 36 WHO Member States, including the European Union, and reflects the urgency around the world to reduce the prevalence of NTDs including Spina Bifida. This initiative is unique as it strengthens relations between actors from different fields, bringing together stakeholders from health, nutrition and disability rights policy as well as the private sector and international organisations dedicated to reducing micronutrient deficiencies. IF Members were instrumental in linking this global action with grassroots advocacy from the local and national level. As the representative organisation for the global Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus community, IF advances the rights and needs of people with SBH. It is extremely important to the SBH community to not only advance fortification policies but to achieve this goal through a rights based perspective on advocacy. The active involvement of representative organisations including IF in international initiatives, such as this proposed draft resolution, is an important step in mainstreaming disability rights as established by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in all initiatives from the local to the international level.

This draft resolution transforms the way the world tackles the global challenges of malnutrition and prevention. Now is the time that we, as a society, take the burden and responsibility for reducing the risks of NTDs in pregnancy away from women and the shame and stigma that this approach results in. **The unrealistic expectation that all persons capable of becoming pregnant should take daily supplements for the entirety of their reproductive years or ensure that they are consuming sufficient levels of folate (Vitamin B9) from an unfortified diet**, a feat which is nearly impossible to achieve, has led to the perception that reducing the risks of NTDs is the personal responsibility of women rather than of a society as a whole.

IF welcomes this draft decision by the WHO Executive Board and urges all WHO Member States to support the proposed resolution at the upcoming seventy-sixth World Health Assembly.

ABOUT IF

The International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (IF) is the international organisation representing people with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus (SBH) and their families worldwide. IF has country members in Africa, Americas, Asia-Pacific, and Europe with unique and expert knowledge on SBH. The mission of IF is to improve the quality of life of people with SBH and their families, and to reduce the prevalence of Neural Tube Defects (NTDs) through improving maternal health literacy, raising awareness, political advocacy, research, community building, and human rights education.

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International Federation for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus

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