



Workshop and Assembly 2026 - "Healthcare for All: Sustainability and Equity"

The two-day workshop on "Healthcare for all: Sustainability and equity," organized by the Pontifical Academy for Life, is presented at the Holy See Press Office, with experts noting that where there is a will, there can be a way to make healthcare possible for all.

The Pontifical Academy for Life's Plenary Assembly this year has centered around a workshop organized by the Academy from February 16-17 on the theme "Healthcare for all: Sustainability and equity."

The president of the Academy, Msgr. Renzo Pegoraro, presented the ongoing discussions and goals of the gathering, together with participating experts, at a press conference hosted by the Holy See Press Office on Tuesday.

Pope Leo XIV addressed the participants a day earlier on Monday, February 16, encouraging them in their work and discussions. He noted that, in a world consumed by conflicts, we must dedicate time and resources to promote life and health and address inequalities by strengthening our understanding of the common good.

Focusing on five core goals

Highlighting key topics discussed during the meetings, Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel, MD, PhD, Vice Provost for Global Initiatives and world-renowned bioethicist at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States, described how well-functioning health care systems share five core goals: universal coverage, reasonable cost, consistently high quality, reduced disparities (especially between urban and rural areas), and satisfaction for both the public and health care workers.

He explained how universal coverage means everyone is included, with special protection for children, who should receive free care as a social good. And private insurance can coexist with strong public systems, provided it does not drain essential staff or resources and instead strengthens the overall system, as seen, for example, in countries like Ethiopia.

Keeping costs under control requires defined national budgets—such as limiting spending to a sustainable share of GDP in wealthier nations—and minimizing out-of-pocket payments so no one faces medical debt.

He went on to describe how high-quality care depends on prioritizing children and addressing common health challenges such as chronic diseases, maternal and infant health issues, infectious diseases, and conditions like hypertension and diabetes.

Ideally, he said, systems should shift focus away from hospitals toward community and home-based care, while reducing disparities between urban and rural populations, and between rich and poor.

He explained how emerging AI technologies may help expand access and improve diagnosis and management, particularly in underserved areas.

Investing in health helps everyone

Professor Sheila Tlou of the African Leaders Malaria Alliance offered examples of where great progress has been made in the healthcare provision in Africa. She noted the HIV/AIDS response, when governments increased investments in HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria, while acknowledging how the continent still lags behind on many Sustainable Development Goals across its 54 diverse countries.

Neonatal mortality remains around 63 per 1,000 live births (far above the target of 12), accounting for a large share of global infant deaths, while maternal mortality is about 445 per 100,000 births compared to a target of 70.

Although HIV infections have dropped significantly—by as much as 70% in some countries—challenges remain, particularly among young women, and prevention of non-communicable diseases like diabetes and hypertension is still insufficient.

She emphasized that primary health care, launched globally in 1978 at Alma-Ata, remains the key solution. Countries such as Botswana, Rwanda, and Namibia have made strong progress by investing in community health workers, prevention, and free health and education systems, supported by good governance and low corruption.

Botswana, for example, dramatically reduced mother-to-child HIV transmission—from 29% to under 1%—through strong political commitment and sustained funding.

She pointed out that health investment is ultimately a political choice: while African leaders pledged in 2001 to allocate 15% of national budgets to health, few have met that goal, but much can be done today to improve this situation.

Guardian of Life award bestowed on Msgr. Robert Vitillo

Msgr. Pegoraro, President of the Academy for Life, announced this year's recipient of the Academy's Guardian of Life award: Msgr. Robert

Vitillo, Senior Advisor to the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The award is dedicated to those who have worked over the years to assist, sustain, care for, and accompany human life. The Academy President paid tribute to Msgr. Vitillo's work over these decades at Caritas Internationalis and the International Catholic Migration Commission, and for the Holy See in working to ensure vital therapies and healthcare reach children in Africa, especially in addressing malaria, AIDS, and tuberculosis.

Striving for healthcare for those on the move

Msgr. Vitillo spoke about healthcare outreach for migrants and refugees in particular and underscored at the outset the need to reframe migration not as a problem to be controlled but as a longstanding human reality that has enriched societies throughout history.

Today, about one billion people live or work outside their country of birth, and many economies depend on their labor and creativity. Among them are over 117 million forcibly displaced people fleeing war, disasters, and climate change—groups that are often unfairly blamed for spreading disease, he noted.

He stressed that there is no evidence migrants caused pandemics such as COVID-19; in fact, many served as frontline caregivers. He pointed out how mental health challenges among migrants are more often the result of trauma, discrimination, and exclusion rather than culture.

The solution, argued Msgr. Vitillo, is integration into national health systems and continuity of care across the entire migration journey, rather than exclusion.

Assuring children have access to HIV/AIDS medicines

Reflecting on the Catholic Church's response to HIV/AIDS through Caritas Internationalis, Msgr. Vitillo recalled how Caritas made the epidemic a priority in the late 1980s. He recalled how at a time when no treatment existed and millions eventually died, Church workers—especially in Africa—provided compassionate home-based care, even in overwhelmed hospitals such as those in Uganda.

He gave historical background, recalling how antiretroviral drugs emerged but remained unaffordable, and Catholic organizations and the Holy See advocated globally for lower prices and helped spur the creation of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

They also appealed to pharmaceutical companies to develop child-friendly HIV medicines, convening industry leaders and regulators at the Vatican to address this ethical gap.

These efforts contributed to dramatic improvements in child survival, illustrated by places like Vietnam, where abandoned children with HIV are now growing up, studying, and thriving.

Msgr. Vitillo concluded saying that true equity and sustainability in health care come not only from funding, but from long-term, community-based commitment that remains before, during, and after crises.



Dear visitor, at the following link to the Osservatore Romano Photo Service, you will find the complete photo gallery of the audience of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV (Monday, 16 February 2026) with participants in the PAV International Workshop “Healthcare for All. Sustainability and Equity” (Rome, 16-17 February 2026):

16 February 2026 – Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life (Vatican Media)

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