

Universal right to health could inspire people, organizations to make real change

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Acknowledging health as a universal human right could galvanize people and organizations to make major improvements in health worldwide, according to new research from faculty at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

"In the U.S., few people think that everyone has a right to health or universal health care. I think that if we commit to protecting everyone's rights to health, and think creatively about how to do so, we can help a lot of people," said Nicole Hassoun, professor of philosophy at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

The human right to health is important for protecting everyone's ability to live minimally good lives, in part, because it gives rise to what Hassoun calls the virtue of creative resolve—a fundamental commitment to overcoming apparent tragedy. That is, those committed to fulfilling the right often refuse to accept that doing so is impossible, and come up with creative ways of fulfilling the right, and act to fulfill it. Those who lead efforts to improve public health often exhibit the virtue.

"Consider how [human rights advocates](#) galvanized a global effort to extend access to [essential medicines](#) for HIV around the world," said Hassoun. "Activists simply refused to accept pharmaceutical companies' claim that it was impossible to lower prices and educated patients to demand access to treatment. Mass protests shifted [public opinion](#) and generic completion brought prices down from \$12,000 per patient per year to \$350. Similar efforts have transformed the global health landscape helping us eliminate smallpox and reduce the prevalence of many other devastating diseases."

Hassoun believes that the human right to health could guide national and international policy.

"Committing to fulfilling everyone's human right to health can help us overcome the need to ration: it can help us find the resources we need to fulfill the right when it seems that we lack them. It can help us criticize existing policies and support proposals for positive change," said Hassoun. "People need many things for health, but that is not a reason to reject the right. By fulfilling everyone's right to health, we may also

fulfill many other rights (e.g. rights to clean water, education, and food). Moreover, the human right to health can require protecting [public health](#) with things like vaccines. Doing so is important for protecting communities as well as individuals."

More information: Nicole Hassoun, The Human Right to Health: A Defense, *Journal of Social Philosophy* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/josp.12298](https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12298)

Provided by Binghamton University

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