Celebrating World Health Day

World Health Day falls on April 7. Here's how you can get involved

BY **JACKSON A. THOMAS**

It's been going steady for the last 70 years, and there's no sign of things slowing down.

Since April 7, 1948, the World Health Organization has been celebrating global health awareness through World Health Day. This day of wellness also marks the WHO's founding, and it's seen as a chance to draw worldwide attention to a particularly important subject each year.

A DAY OF WELLNESS

The first celebration was called the World Health Assembly. According to the WHO, it organizes local, regional and international events related to a theme. Past themes have included emerging infectious diseases (1997), safe motherhood (1998), mental health (2001), climate change and how it affects our health (2008), healthy hearts and blood pressure (2013), food safety (2015) and depression (2017).

"In 2012, the theme was aging and health with the slogan 'Good Health Adds Life to Years,'" says Dr. Arve Willingham of the Ross University School of Veterinary Medicine, who previously worked at the WHO's Special Program for Tropical Diseases Research and Training.

"Millions of people around the world participated in 'yogathons' in more than 100 cities across the globe highlighting yoga as a part of healthy living."

Activities range from health fairs that provide a range of diagnostic screenings to plays or film screenings that bring a health-related issue to life for an audience, says Chase Crossno, an assistant professor of medical education at the University of North Texas Health Science Center in Fort Worth.

"It can also inspire school teachers to develop lesson plans highlighting World Health Day in their classrooms, sometimes embracing the annual theme or taking their own spin on it to promote healthy behavior with students," she says. "It's pretty awesome."

This year's theme is universal health coverage. The slogan is "Health for All," and the hashtags that will be used are #HealthForAll and #WorldHealthDay. The day will kick off a series of events through 2018 focused on universal health care, with the goal of "ensuring that everyone, everywhere can access essential quality health services without facing financial hardship," according to the WHO.

"This is a big one," Crossno says. "The World Health Organization is grounded in the idea that all people should be able to realize their full health potential. ... Most high-income countries have established systems for universal health coverage, meaning nearly 100 percent of the population from these countries have their health care needs covered. Data from these systems indicates that these systems work — and that UHC is possible, even in low-income countries."

MAKE YOUR MOVE

If you're looking to get involved and participate this year, the WHO suggests:

• Communicate your needs, opinions and expectations to local policymakers, politicians and other representatives.

• Ensure your community-health needs are taken into account and prioritized at the local level, including through social media.

• Organize activities such as policy debates, concerts, marches and interviews to provide people an opportunity to interact with their representatives on the topic of UHC via media and social media.

And, Crossno says, people can challenge themselves to learn just one thing about a particular health issue daily, "then perhaps take it a step further and engage their online community in a dialogue about that fact," she says. "For those ready to get out in their physical community, a person could organize a mobile blood collection in their community or volunteer with a needle exchange van. There are so many ways to engage with health and wellness. A person just needs to find their fit."