

# Introduction

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## **Public Health Challenges at the Beginning of the New Century**

Social and economic developments are recognized as some of the main determinants of human health. And this in turn has a strong influence on levels of development. Thus a highly dynamic and complex process is established. Its understanding and our capacity to modulate it are deeply felt aspirations in our society. This book brings together the lectures that were given during the course on “Public Health Challenges at the Beginning of the New Century” held in San Sebastian in July 2001. The course was addressed to a multidisciplinary audience whose active participation in the lectures contributed to the dynamics of the program.

It consists of 12 chapters on the present situation and near-term prospects in public health. As well as discussing the social and economic determinants of health care, and ethics and public health, it broaches several topics of current concern regarding the situation of developing versus developed countries. It covers some of the most pressing health problems and especially those tied in with the globalization process—poverty versus wealth. Also discussed are the effects of environmental conditions on health, the magnitude of the pollution problem and strategies for its prevention and control and the health effects of climate change, with consideration given to the growing speed of communication in today’s world. Finally, some ideas are put forward about the research priorities we should be pursuing.

This book may be useful for public health care workers, physicians, nurses and economists, and is intended to fuel debate about current challenges in public health and health policy at a worldwide level. We are indebted to the BBVA Foundation for the support provided for its publication.