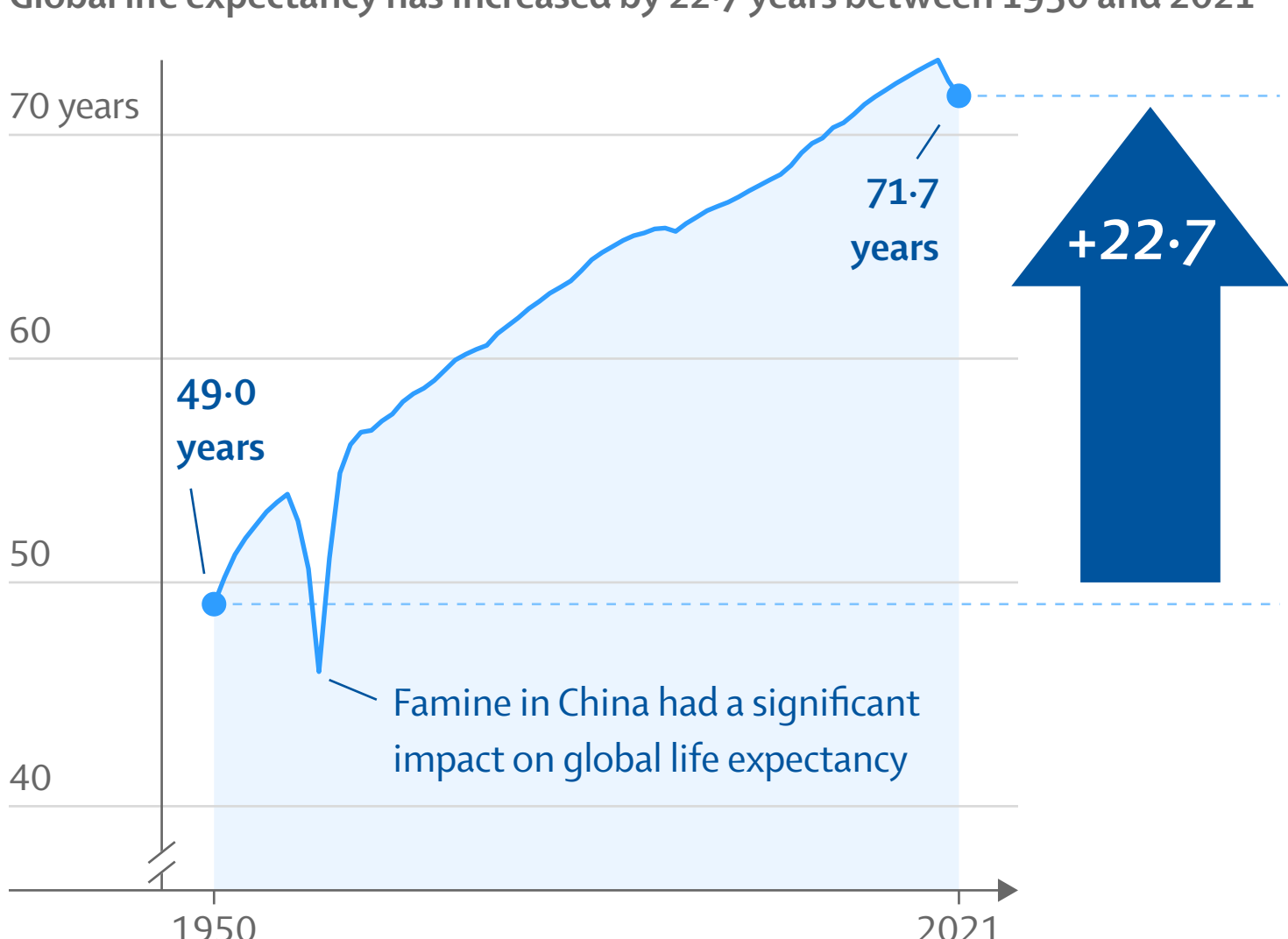


# As COVID-19 has shown, continued global health progress is not assured

Over the past 70 years, the world has enjoyed remarkably sustained progress in lowering child and adult mortality

Global life expectancy has increased by 22.7 years between 1950 and 2021



At the same time, age-standardised deaths from enteric infections (especially diarrhoea) have decreased

Enteric infection deaths per 100k

1990 60.3

2021 16.9

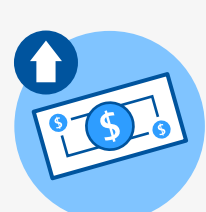
This has been driven by:

- » Improvements in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) practices
- » Improved delivery of specific interventions such as childhood vaccination; and
- » Increased access to effective health care

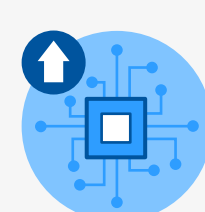
Since 1950, the world has generally benefited from:



Rising educational attainment



Increasing income per capita

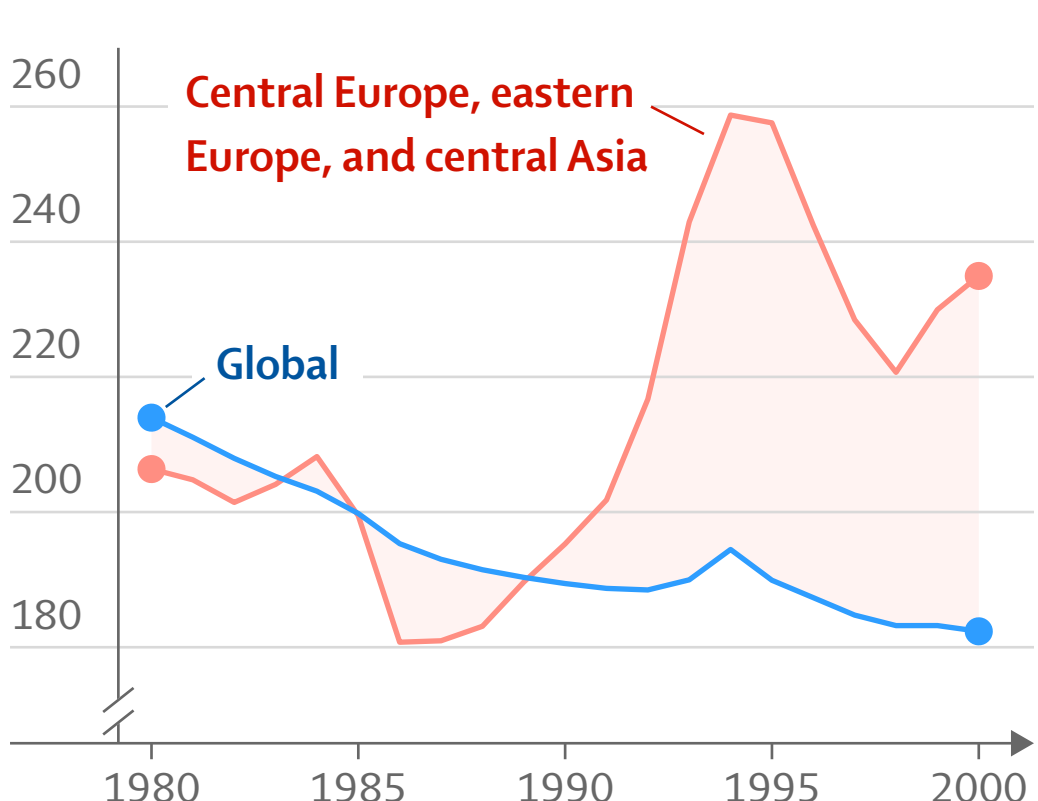


Remarkable technical innovation

However, there have also been many major setbacks for global health, such as:

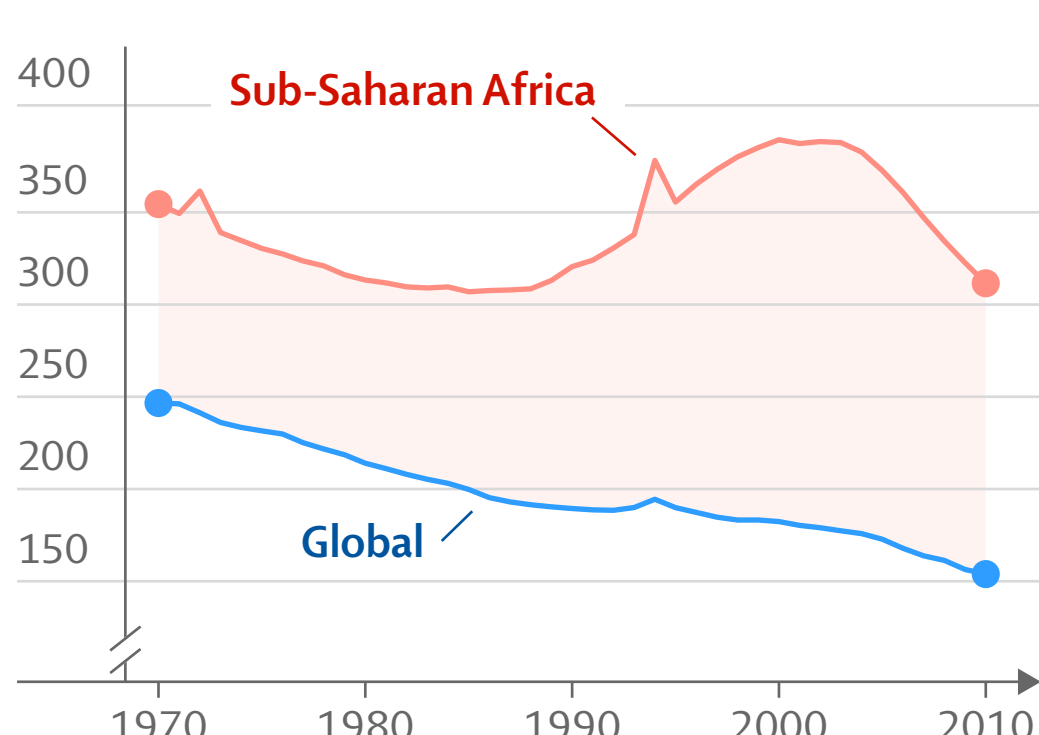
The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a rise in adult mortality in eastern Europe and central Asia

Adult mortality rate, deaths per 1000



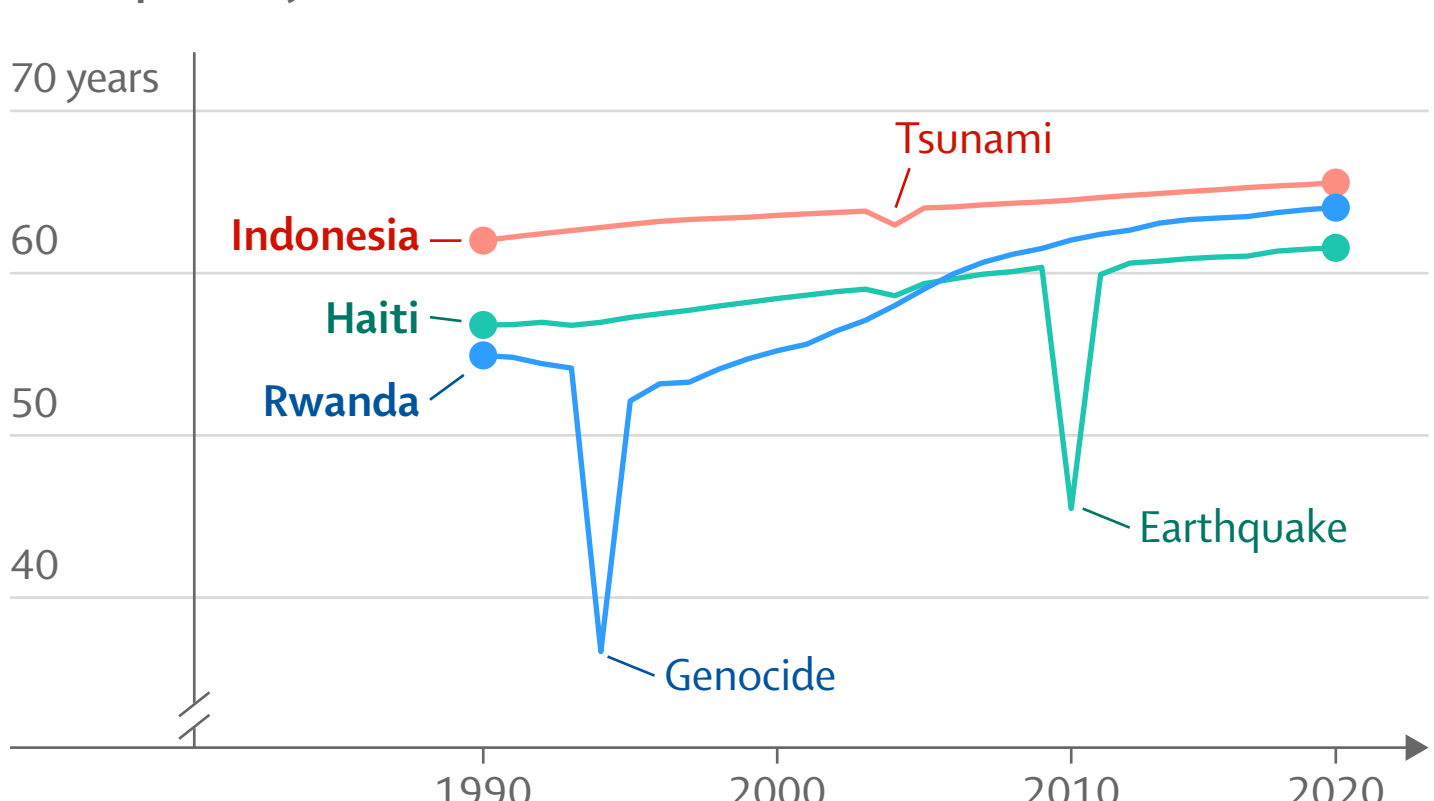
Countries hit hard by the HIV/AIDS epidemic have had sharp increases in adult mortality before the discovery and rollout of antiretroviral therapy

Adult mortality rate, deaths per 1000

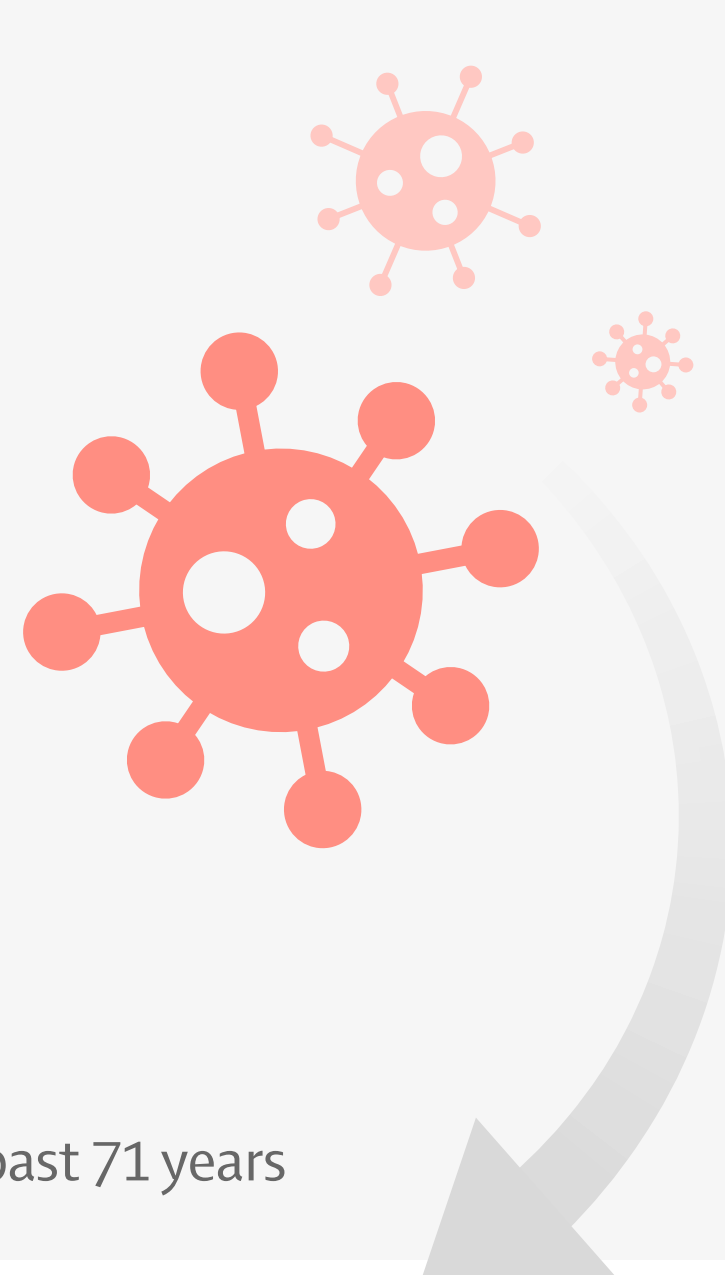


Conflict and natural disasters such as the genocide in Rwanda (1994), the tsunami in the Indian Ocean (2004), and the Haitian earthquake (2010)

Life expectancy at birth

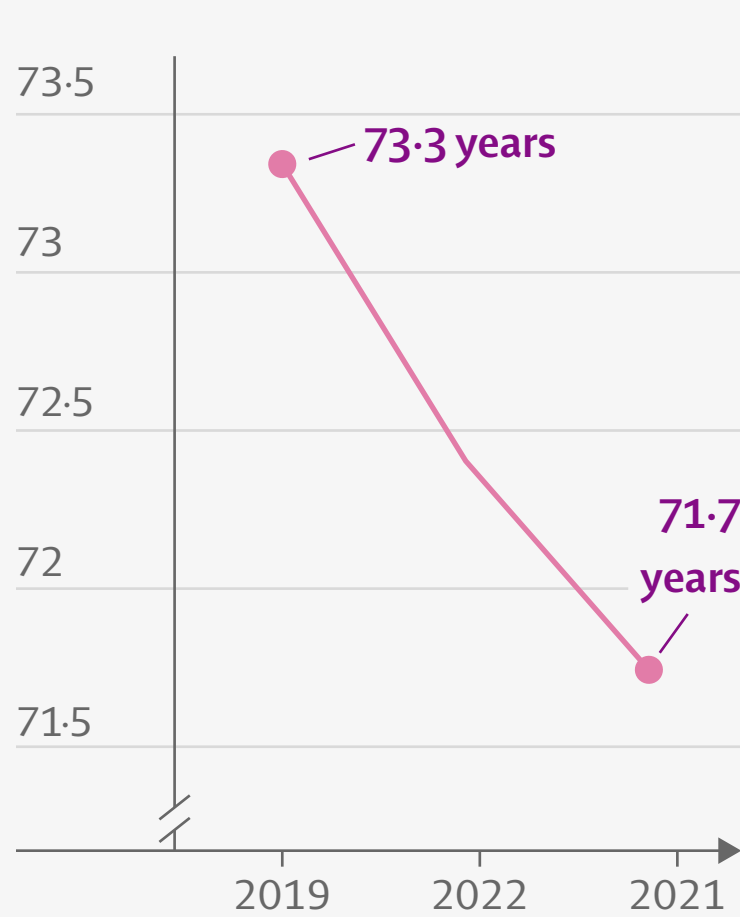


And, most recently, COVID-19



COVID-19 has been the largest setback in global health over the past 71 years

Global life expectancy decreased by 1.6 years between 2019 and 2021



The impact was felt across the planet and varied substantially among countries and territories

Life expectancy fell in 172 countries and territories

Peru -6.5 years

1.5 6.0

32 countries and territories saw life expectancy rise

San Marino +2.6 years

1.5 6.0

Country-specific changes in life expectancy between 2019 and 2021 ranged from a 6.5-year decline in Peru to a 2.6-year increase in San Marino

Circles in these plots are positioned centrally over the capital city of each country or territory



In countries where high quality data are available, we have a detailed understanding of the impacts COVID-19 had in the first 2 years of the pandemic, including:

- » Mortality rates in children younger than 5 years continuing to fall
- » Among adults\*, the pandemic reversed long-term trends of decreasing mortality
- » Larger increases in mortality rates in males than females

\* People older than 15 years

- » Mortality outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic were not solely determined by socio-economic factors; access to vaccination, public policies, and individual behaviour changes influenced the severity of the pandemic in countries and territories across the socio-economic spectrum

However, controversy remains about the true impacts of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa and many low-income countries. This is largely due to:

! Lack of centralised data systems

! Interruptions in routine surveys and lags in data reporting

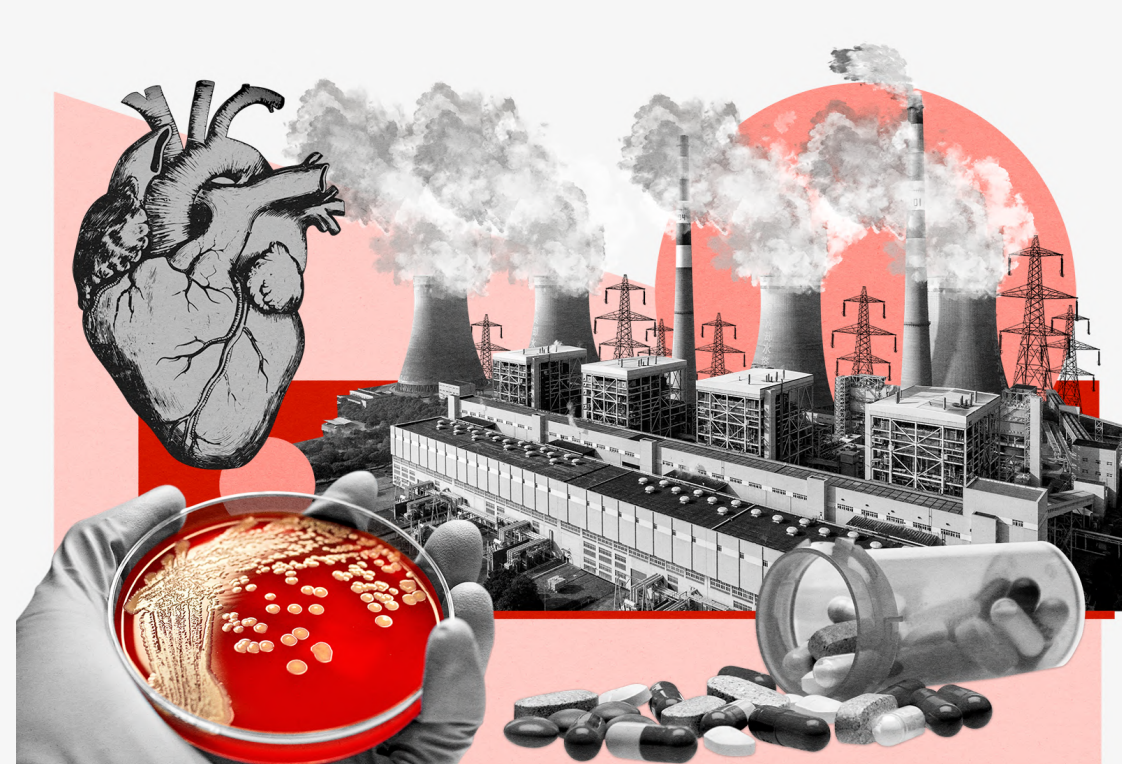


Continued progress is not guaranteed

The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder that health gains are precarious. We cannot assume that because there has been progress in the past it is sure to continue.

Even before the pandemic, warning signs of new challenges with the potential to derail the general trend of progress had surfaced, such as:

- » The slowing, or even reversal, in the decline of cardiovascular disease mortality in several countries
- » The sharp rise in opioid deaths, particularly from fentanyl overdoses, in some countries
- » The growing risks of human-caused climate change
- » The mounting dangers of antimicrobial resistance
- » The need to tackle non-communicable diseases



Illustrations by Pete Baker



To maintain our progress, the world needs to invest in:

- » Monitoring population health via surveillance
- » Maintaining, improving, and implementing comprehensive vital registration systems
- » Health workforces who can adapt to novel situations
- » Supporting policy makers to adapt to fresh challenges
- » Proactive strategies to deal with emerging threats

All GBD papers published by The Lancet Group are available here: [www.thelancet.com/gbd](http://www.thelancet.com/gbd)

GBD 2021 Collaborators. Findings from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021. *Lancet* 2024; published May 18.