# ABOUT RUDOLF VIRCHOW

Rudolf Virchow (1821–1902) was one of the most influential figures in the history of medicine, public health, and social reform. Born on 13 October 1821 in Świdwin (then Prussia, now Poland), Virchow trained as a physician and went on to become a pioneering pathologist, anthropologist, public health advocate, and politician.

He is widely regarded as the founder of modern pathology through his groundbreaking work in cellular pathology and research on disorders of blood circulation, which revolutionised the understanding of disease. Beyond his scientific achievements, Rudolf Virchow held the conviction that medicine is inseparably linked to social living conditions – a concept he captured in his famous statement:

**“Medicine is a social science, and politics is nothing but medicine on a grand scale.”**

This holistic approach led him to become the founder of social medicine, recognising that public health is also shaped by economic, environmental, and political determinants. He worked tirelessly to address poverty, improve sanitation, and reform education – firmly believing that health could only be achieved through societal change.

Virchow’s impact extended well beyond science. As a liberal politician and co-founder of the German Progressive Party, he advocated for democratic reforms, peace, universal education, and accessible healthcare. He embraced the then-revolutionary idea that “freedom, education, and well-being” are prerequisites for health, thereby declaring prevention the highest goal. Long before this concept entered international policy, he understood health as a fundamental human right.

# VIRCHOW AND THE VIRCHOW PRIZE

The Virchow Prize was officially announced on 24 October 2021 during the ceremonial opening of the World Health Summit (WHS) in Berlin, on the occasion of Rudolf Virchow’s 200th birthday. The announcement was made by Detlev Ganten, Founding President of the WHS, former CEO of Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, and Co-Founder of the Virchow Foundation.

Distinguished speakers at the ceremony included UN Secretary-General António Guterres, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and German Federal Minister of Health Jens Spahn. The WHS was held under the High Patronage of Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, Emmanuel Macron, President of France, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO.

The announcement of the Virchow Prize marked the symbolic start of a prestigious scientific award that honours the legacy of Rudolf Virchow and his holistic vision for global health. Just as Virchow bridged diverse disciplines to improve health, the Prize recognises individuals and institutions that have made outstanding contributions to health, sustainability, and international collaboration across the full spectrum of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

View the announcement at the WHS 2021 Opening Ceremony [here](https://youtu.be/OJFKBritLlc?si=YKw-uk-C6MOBc9Iv).