

## The 2024 WHO Regional Committee Meetings: A Strategic Lever for NCD Action

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Idioma Inglés

The 2024 WHO Regional Committee Meetings (RCMs) happening from August to October this year, provided a crucial stage for NCD advocacy, bringing together alliances across regions to champion noncommunicable disease (NCD) priorities. These meetings are not just technical discussions — they are platforms for regional advocacy, providing an entry point for civil society advocates to engage with key stakeholders, strengthen partnerships, gather intelligence and strategically influence health agendas ahead of **the 2025 UN High-Level Meeting (HLM) on NCDs**.

### NCD Alliance representation front and center

As a key platform for regional NCD advocacy, NCDA was represented by delegations of advocates from the regional NCD alliances supported by the Advocacy Institute's Regional Advocacy Track:

- Africa NCDs Network (ANN) and East Africa NCD Alliance (EANCDA) in **AFRO**
- Eastern Mediterranean NCD Alliance (EMR NCDA) in **EMRO**
- Healthy America's Coalition (CLAS) and Healthy Caribbean Coalition (HCC) in **PAHO**
- Southeast Asia NCD Alliance (SEAR NCDA) in **SEARO**
- Healthy Philippines Alliance (HPA) - currently being awarded a small competitive grant as part of the track to spur regional engagement in the absence of a formed regional NCD alliance - in **WPRO**

Across all regions, the RCMs reaffirmed their importance as platforms for NCD advocacy. They enable civil society advocates to engage directly with policymakers, health officials, and WHO leadership, gather intelligence on regional and global health priorities as well as highlight the urgency of addressing NCDs within broader health agendas like UHC, climate resilience, and mental health.

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**“The RCM is Africa's Opportunity. There are few better platforms than it to engage with policymakers. With such high-level clearance, we were able to meet those stakeholders we**

wouldn't easily meet, not just from our countries but from the entire continent. It is an absolute opportunity for the ANN to engage meaningfully to advance the NCD agenda in Africa." - Ferdinand M. Sonyuy from Africa NCDs Network.



Photo: ANN and EANCDA delegations urging all the governments to fulfill their commitments to address the burden of NCD

## Moment to present statements on key issues

Apart from mingling with decision-makers and trying to keep an ear to the ground on all that would be happening in the region next, each of the alliances had the chance to deliver intervention statements on relevant agenda items. The agendas are set by the regional offices and vary per region.

**“[Submitting an intervention statement] is a way of showing active participation in discussions on crucial topics such as integrating NCDs in emergency settings, strengthening the healthcare workforce, and addressing the impact of climate change on NCDs in the region. This strategic involvement not only amplified the voice of civil society in regional health policy discussions but also reinforced the importance of collaborative efforts in tackling NCDs in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.” - Ibtihal Fadhil, EMR NCD Alliance**

As an example, WPRO focused their statements on **NCDs and aging**, a growing concern in the region but also **primary health care** and **health financing** to sustain NCD interventions. AFRO discussed issues such as **diabetes**, **climate and health** or **local manufacturing of medicines**.

PAHO concentrated its attention on a number of relevant agenda items including tobacco control, health system transformation as well as strategy for health-related laws. The latter two items had little reference to NCDs in their scope which is what colleagues from both CLAS and HCC highlighted in their statements. All the submitted statements are published on the WHO website and can be used as advocacy tools to advance responses to a specific

issue well beyond the RCM itself.

RCMs also present a formal governance mechanism. As such, the new Regional Director General was elected by the Member States in both AFRO and SEARO regions this year, a process observed by the alliances first-hand.

## Towards the 2025 UN HLM on NCDs

The road to the 2025 UN HLM on NCDs is paved with opportunities to advance NCD priorities, and the RCMs were a critical milestone in this journey. The collective efforts of NCDA's regional alliances at the 2024 RCMs exemplify the power of strategic advocacy, ensuring that NCDs remain high on the global health agenda.

The momentum built through these meetings sets the stage for impactful and coordinated action towards the HLM, ensuring that the NCDs movement will get the most out of this opportunity through strong political engagement and activated networks.

**“RCM acts as a scope to engage with regional stakeholders, align on shared priorities, and accelerate efforts to address the profound toll NCDs impose on families, communities, and health systems. The opportunity highlights the urgency of building political leadership, mobilising financing, and integrating civil society voices to drive sustainable progress toward SDG target 3.4 and the broader NCD agenda to maximise the opportunity of the HLM on NCDs next year.” - Farihin Sultana, SEAR NCDA**

To this end, in follow-up to the RCMs the regional alliances held a series of virtual regional advocacy planning meetings that took place in November, building on the momentum generated towards the Global NCD Alliance Forum which was expected to occur in October. The outcomes of the regional meetings serve as the foundation for regional advocacy plans for the 2025 HLM campaign, which will be built upon and further developed at the Civil Society Coordination Session at the Global NCD Alliance Forum now to be held in February 2025.



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*Photo: Farihin Sultana from SEAR NCDA reading a statement.*

For updates and resources on NCDA's advocacy work, visit our website. Together, we're turning commitments into action to address the global NCD burden

*The Alliances that are a part of the Advocacy Institute Regional Advocacy track are supported thanks to NCDA's partnership with Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.*

## About the author:

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