

World Leaders Make Strong Commitment to Addressing the Global Non-Communicable Disease Crisis

The NCD Alliance welcomes agreement by leaders of the 193 UN Member States on a Political Declaration recognizing the scale of the global NCD crisis and the urgent need for action ahead of a High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on 19-20 September.

“The NCD Alliance and the 2,000 members in its global network have worked tirelessly to ensure the draft Political Declaration, to be agreed by governments next week, moves beyond rhetoric and vague pronouncements to include concrete commitments”, said Ann Keeling, Chair of the NCD Alliance. “While it falls short in several key areas, the Declaration is a strongly-worded document that will accelerate international progress on NCDs and provide a framework for saving millions of people from preventable death and disability due to NCDs”

An overarching goal and set of time-bound targets is missing from the draft, however it contains an agreement to develop, in 2012, a comprehensive global monitoring framework for NCDs and a set of voluntary global targets and indicators.

Member States have also agreed to hold a comprehensive review in 2014, which the NCD Alliance believes should include a follow-up High-Level Meeting. This review will provide an opportunity to track commitments made in the present Declaration and assess progress on the global targets and indicators that Member States should deliver on. It will also provide an opportunity to ensure that NCDs are integrated with other health priorities in future internationally-agreed development goals when the current Millennium Development Goals end in 2015.

Agreement was reached on several issues of contention during hard-fought negotiations including commitments in the Declaration to increase access to affordable, safe, effective and quality medicines; and to palliative and rehabilitative services particularly at the community level. It also includes a commitment to accelerate implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, to eliminate industrially-produced trans-fats in foods, and to implement interventions to reduce consumption of salt, sugars and saturated fats. In addition, Member States have agreed to introduce policies and actions aimed at promoting healthy diets and increasing physical activity in the entire population.

While the Declaration acknowledges the importance of increasing taxes to reduce tobacco consumption, the language on curbing the harmful use of alcohol is particularly weak, with no reference at all to essential measures on the price and availability of alcohol. Regrettably, Member States have ignored calls from the NCD Alliance to agree measures to protect children from the marketing of alcohol but have committed to implement WHO recommendations to restrict the marketing to children of foods high in fats, sugar and salt; and to reverse the rising trends of obesity in children, youth and adults.

The Declaration calls for increased resources for NCDs through domestic, bilateral and multilateral channels and it recognizes that resources devoted to dealing with NCDs are not commensurate with the magnitude of the problem. However, it falls short of any concrete commitments and only requests Member States to investigate options for potential sources of funding.

Throughout negotiations, the NCD Alliance has strongly urged Member States to agree to the creation of a global partnership of UN organizations, governments and civil society to coordinate and implement commitments made in the Declaration. Although Member States did not reach agreement on this, they are requesting the UN Secretary-General to present them with recommendations in 2012 outlining options for such a UN partnership. The NCD Alliance believes NGOs must be involved in the process of developing these recommendations and that this need not take another year. This process can be up and running early in 2012.

The Declaration highlights that collaboration at national, regional and international levels is needed to tackle NCDs. The private sector can be an important part of the solution to effective *implementation* of NCD interventions. The NCD Alliance insists that *policy development* is firewalled against potential conflicts of interest, and supports the establishment of an ethical framework and a code of conduct to guide government, NGO and private sector partners. Importantly, the Declaration recognizes the fundamental conflict of interest between the tobacco industry and public health.

NCDs have finally made it to the global 'top table' and onto the radar of world leaders at the UN General Assembly in New York. The Declaration, once adopted on 20 September, means NCDs will stay on the UN agenda for years to come. It has taken the hard work and determination of many people around the world to get to this point and tremendous progress has been made in the last two years.

The NCD Alliance and a broad range of NGOs and allies from other sectors, particularly governments, have played an important role in the process to date. This is just the beginning. We are ready to put the resources of our network behind the implementation of measures to save lives, improve the lives of people with NCDs, and prevent the future growth of the NCD epidemic.