

Open Letter to Governments ahead of the UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage
September 2019

From promises to progress on Health for All

Your excellencies,

Ahead of the forthcoming UN General Assembly, we congratulate Heads of State and Government for your focus on achieving universal health coverage (UHC) and the invaluable promise of Health for All. You are part of an international community which has much to be proud of, having made massive strides towards better health in recent decades. Life expectancy has increased in most countries, quality of life has improved beyond recognition in much of the world, thanks in part to the drive to meet the Millennium Development Goals. In our lifetimes, we have witnessed how countries and lives can be transformed for the better when political will exists.

At the same time, we ask you not to underestimate the next great challenge that still lies ahead to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in just ten years. Action is urgent. Put simply, the vast majority of countries are not doing enough, and are failing to deliver on commitments to reduce premature deaths from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) by one-third by 2030. Quality of life is not keeping pace with life expectancy improvements: whilst in many places people are living longer, more of those additional years are spent in poor health, often with multiple chronic conditions including mental ill-health.

We ask you to act on your responsibilities as leaders to bridge the unjust and unjustifiable gaps between promises and progress: the promises to UHC, to fair access to good quality care, to properly funded healthcare workforces, to preventing and managing diseases and tackling their causes. We call on you to apply a life course approach to UHC from prevention to palliation, in integrated health systems which prioritise health rather than individual diseases, respect human rights, and put people living with NCDs at the heart of decision-making. We call on you to prioritise equity, including for marginalised groups, to leave no one behind. This includes ensuring the rights of women and girls everywhere to govern their own sexual and reproductive health, an issue which has been consistently, unacceptably attacked in negotiations. The rights and needs of migrants, refugees, indigenous peoples, the oldest and the youngest in every society need to be respected and enshrined on paper.

The High-Level Meeting on UHC should be a transformative moment for every single country, every person on earth. UHC is the single most powerful tool you have to improve lives, ensure fairness and stability, create opportunities for growth and to reach the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It will fail if you are not prepared to invest. You must go beyond promises.

We ask that you use the opportunity in New York to demonstrate leadership. It is in your power to prevent much of the early death, pain and financial strain inflicted by NCDs on your country, and, when within your means, on other countries. We ask you to deploy tried and tested measures to improve wellbeing and reduce NCD mortality in line with commitments for 2025 and 2030, to include NCD prevention and care in UHC benefit packages, and to ensure no one is pushed into poverty by their health needs.

Health for All is in your hands.

Yours,

The NCD Alliance

Signatories can be found on the NCD Alliance website ncdalliance.org