
Leveraging solutions to improve access to healthcare for people living with NCDs



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On Tuesday 20 September, NCD Alliance hosted an event in the margins of the 71st United Nations General Assembly focused on *Leveraging Solutions to Improve Access to Healthcare for People Living with NCDs*, held in New York.

Moderated by Ms Catharine Taylor, Vice President, Management Sciences for Health, the event explored the different dimensions of access to healthcare for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in the context of health systems strengthening and Universal Health Coverage (UHC), including case studies exemplifying structural gaps and associated barriers. Speakers also discussed the need to scale-up solutions to improve access to and availability of NCD medicines, technologies, and services, particularly in low-and middle-income countries.

Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa, spoke about the gains made in putting NCDs on the international development agenda, including in the African region where many countries are battling a double burden of disease due to communicable diseases and NCDs. She highlighted the importance of people and local communities as decision makers, and that people's needs must be addressed in an integrated manner.

Vice Minister of Health of Chile, Dr Jaime Burrows, discussed the policy actions Chile has taken to address the high burden of mortality due to NCDs, and emphasized the need to enact legislation and public policy focused on prevention. The Chilean insurance system, a mix of public and private, allows for the majority of citizens to access affordable, quality care when needed.

Further highlighting the need for comprehensive insurance, Dr Gerald Yonga, Professor of Medicine and Head of NCD Research to Policy Unit at Aga Khan University, East Africa, and Chair of NCD Alliance Kenya, discussed the high out of pocket expenditure spent on health in Kenya. The country's national health insurance fund is exploring a graded form of taxation according to an individual's income, to ensure that all are covered and can access care and treatment without experiencing catastrophic financial strain. Dr Yonga also spoke about the need to support community health workers, particularly in educating citizens about prevention.

Ms Abish Romero, from Mexico, gave a patient's perspective in the challenges and barriers to care. In her case, Mexico's universal health coverage scheme, which includes financial protection, enable her to access cancer treatment.

"The SDGs are an open door for us to rethink how we address NCDs, and to see patients as a key component of this transformative process." –Abish Romero

Ms Helen McGuire, Program Leader for Noncommunicable Diseases at PATH, gave an overview of PATH's programs and studies on supply chains for NCD medicines, and the assessment of availability and affordability in both private and public facilities. The studies highlighted the need for more data to inform procurement decisions and improve affordability of NCD medicines in LMICs.

"The barriers to access are overcome with a holistic approach, working across sectors, with sustainability in mind." –Helen McGuire

Finally, Ms Jessica Daly, Senior Portfolio Lead for Chronic Care at Medtronic Foundation, called for the need to strengthen chronic care and ensure services and support systems are close to home and communities. Ms Daly spoke about the role of the private sector and their role in improving equity and access to health coverage. She also emphasized the need to support community health workers who are often able to direct people to appropriate care.

"Public and private sectors have a shared focus on strengthening health systems and creating healthy communities." –Jessica Daly

Panelists agreed that community health workers have a large role to play in reducing pressure on primary care facilities, and are often able to reach those who might fall through the cracks in a typical health system model. A strong health system requires UHC that provides financial protection, access to quality and affordable medicines and technology, and the ability to respond to people's needs. Engaging people living with NCDs is a critical element of care going forward if we are to achieve our global goals of reducing disability and premature mortality due to NCDs.

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