

Global NCDA Forum Day 4: Advocate, agitate and communicate: Stand up, be vocal, and be strong in our uncertain world

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NCD Alliance CEO, Katie Dain, and Mayor of Kigali, Samuel Dusengiyumva, walking during Kigali Car Free Day on 16 February 2025 ©Gilberto Lontro/NCD Alliance

When the NCD Alliance Global Forum was postponed last October, no one could have predicted that it would be held in the eye of a storm enveloping global health, precipitated by the US withdrawal from WHO and by threats to longstanding sources of development assistance. These are unprecedentedly difficult times, full of uncertainty, and with millions of lives at stake as health systems and services are suddenly disrupted.

It is hard to see past the immediate crisis – but the Forum identified hope and opportunity. We know that the funding status quo, focused on siloed disease areas, has not been centred on people's needs. From now on, as trust in continuous development funding is undermined and decisions politicised, governments need to look to the future. Health systems will have to be reshaped and optimised to deliver more efficient, effective, integrated care, treating the whole person rather than individual conditions.

This is the moment to seize the opportunity to work together to bridge the gap in prevention and care, seeking sustainable resourcing to unite reproductive, maternal and child health, infectious disease and NCDs, mental health and wellbeing in holistic programmes that work for the good of everyone: Health For All.

International funding will continue to play an essential catalytic role – but, to be sustainable, national resources must be mobilised. This includes the development of strong health taxes, which generate revenue while also reducing consumption of unhealthy products and reducing long-term health costs – a triple-win that was reiterated many times during the Forum.

We may not yet know what the world will look like in a week, a month or a year – but we all have a role to play today in urgently reimagining a global health system that is more responsive to people's needs, wherever they live and whatever their age. This reimagining must involve people with lived experience and young people as equal partners in shaping the policies that affect them. The Forum epitomised why this is so essential: their engagement was the driving force in making the three days so positive and knowledgeable. During the formal proceedings and more informally

(including at Kigali Car-Free Day – see box), the Forum fostered the wide connections and fruitful conversations that will be essential to taking this agenda forward. The hope for a better future was tangible.

Now, we look ahead. First, to the UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs in September, which will be a vital platform to make the case to governments and funders for an integrated approach. It is an opportunity to inspire leadership, to increase financing and to ensure much more meaningful involvement of people living with NCDs in all parts of the world and of all ages. Next, the horizon for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is just five years away, and governments must be held to account on their commitment to reduce premature death from NCDs by a third by 2030. Then, beyond the SDGs, the health of generations yet unborn will be central to development, and the accompanying processes and priorities must be led by those with the greatest stake in this future: young people themselves.

In the Closing Ceremony, we were reminded of the words of Sir George Alleyne, one of the founding fathers of the Global Forum, which ring as true as ever: we must continue to '*advocate, agitate and communicate*'. Thank you to all the organisers, partners, sponsors and delegates who have made this week what it was. As we return to our homes in the 90 countries represented at the Forum, we must stand up, be vocal, be strong to our mission and values, and work with others to make a healthier, happier world for all of us.

Car-Free Day in Kigali

We were reminded at the Forum that not only do we all want more years in our lives, we all want more life in our years and, early on Sunday morning, we had the chance to get a taste of how Kigali is making this happen. Since 2016, on the first and third Sundays of every month, major roads in the city are closed completely to motor traffic for a few hours, leaving them open to walkers, runners, skateboarders and cyclists (to whom chapeau! for braving the hills). We joined many others in walking five kilometres to a central spot where hundreds of people were taking part in an impressively vigorous aerobics session. As the heat gathered, we could rest in the Rwanda NCD Alliance's tent and have our weight, height and blood pressure taken and our eyesight and teeth tested. It was a great opportunity to continue our conversations and reflect on the huge injection of positivity that the Forum has given us all.

About the co-authors:

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