

## Inaugural Global NCD Alliance Forum to be held in sub-Saharan Africa gets underway amidst global health turbulence

Language English



NCD advocates gathering for a group photo at Power-up NCD Advocacy pre-conference ahead of the the Global NCD Froum

*For immediate release*

### MEDIA RELEASE

**A perfect storm: noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are set to overtake infectious, maternal, neonatal, and nutritional (CMNN) diseases combined as the leading cause of mortality in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030. The Global NCD Alliance Forum will look at solutions to reduce preventable deaths and disability from NCDs and improve access to quality healthcare.**

**Minister of State for Health, Dr Yvan Butera to address the Opening Ceremony.**

**Thursday, February 13, 2025 (Kigali, Rwanda)**-- 700 advocates, experts and ministerial representatives from over 66 countries working in noncommunicable disease prevention and care will attend the [4th Global NCD Alliance Forum](#) [1] (the Forum) to be held in Kigali, Rwanda February 13-15. This is the first edition of the event to be held in sub-Saharan Africa at a time when the health of millions of people is under threat by the freezing of development aid and long-established health programs by the U.S. Administration and the announced U.S withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO).

The Forum (in-person only) is a key global health event in the lead up to the 4th United Nations High Level Meeting (HLM) on NCDs taking place in New York in September. It is co-hosted by the NCD Alliance and Rwanda NCD Alliance, in collaboration with the Rwanda Ministry of Health and the Rwanda Biomedical Centre. The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust serves as a strategic partner. The theme of this year's Forum is *Leadership on NCDs towards 2025 & beyond*.

"We live in an era of polycrisis, with pandemics, climate change, conflicts and humanitarian crises locking horns across the globe," said **Katie Dain**, CEO of the NCD Alliance. "At the centre of this storm are people

living with NCDs”.

“The Trump administration’s recent freeze on development aid and the potential dismantling of USAID has sent a shockwave through the global health community. It is paralysing health programmes that are providing lifesaving medication and treatment to people and turns upside down the health financing landscape as we knew it. Any hit to global health financing is a hit for all health issues, including NCDs.”

The dual burden of infectious and noncommunicable diseases creates unique circumstances in many African countries, where HIV prevalence is higher than the global average. While people with HIV are living longer thanks to scaling up of HIV treatment programmes, their risk of developing NCDs and neurocognitive conditions that are common with aging, is significantly increasing. The increased exposure to risk factors like tobacco, alcohol, unhealthy food, and air pollution are also contributing factors, as are physical inactivity, stress and mental health issues.

Today, NCDs – such as cancer, heart diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes, and also mental health conditions – such as depression and anxiety, account for [74 per of deaths globally](#) [2]. The number of people living with NCDs dwarfs that of many other health issues combined. 1 billion people are living with obesity, 1.3 billion with hypertension, a billion living with a mental health disorder, and half a billion people living with diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases.

“In the five short years since we last held the Forum, in Sharjah in the UAE, we have lost 215 million people to NCDs. To put that in context, that is the population of Nigeria,” said Dain.

“It is well-known that prevention is the answer to getting the NCD burden under control. Real progress has been made in creating healthier environments and reducing the risk factors, thanks to the hard work of many people who are here at this year’s Forum, with more countries implementing legislation to tax unhealthy products, restrict marketing and improve front of pack labelling. But the prevalence of tobacco, unhealthy food, alcohol and air pollution remains stubbornly high, and the world is set to miss all of the 2025 risk factor targets. This year’s UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs is our opportunity to get on the right track.”

“We know how to reduce the NCD burden, we have the toolkit of solutions at our fingertips. What is needed is political leadership and financing commensurate with the burden to rapidly scale the implementation,” said Dain.

Like most sub-Sahara African countries over the past two decades, Rwanda has experienced significant increases in the burden of NCDs. The Rwanda Ministry of Health has responded by implementing NCD strategies that focus strongly on health system strengthening.

“We recognise NCDs as a priority health issue in Rwanda and across the sub-Saharan Africa region, where NCDs now account for more than a third of total deaths, a jump from 24% in 2000. In just five years’ time, NCDs will surpass HIV/AIDS, TB and maternal mortality as the leading cause of death, which means health systems must get prepared now. The backbone of the Rwanda response on NCDs has been building up our public health system with integrated primary care, and a strong focus on population wide screening and early detection,” said **Dr Francois Uwinkindi**, Division Manager, Non Communicable Diseases, Rwanda Biomedical Center, addressing the Official Opening Press Conference.

“We are also very proud of our progress in making treatment accessible to all members of our society. Our community-based health insurance scheme has enabled a large portion of the population – over 90% - to access healthcare. Enrolment has increased most notably among the poorest and most vulnerable groups, including those living in rural communities that have historically faced geographical barriers to care. Over the past two decades, Rwanda has become a true leader in healthcare access and health system reform within the region.”

Rwanda NCD Alliance Chairperson, **Dr. Joseph Mucumbitsi**, highlighted the progress in meaningful involvement of civil society and people affected by NCDs for strengthening the NCD response across sub-Saharan Africa. He noted that this progress has significantly raised public awareness of diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, and that tailored policies tackling the main NCD risk factors like tobacco and air pollution will be increasingly crucial in the years ahead.

"If we are to prevent avoidable suffering and deaths from NCDs, it is essential that we continue to strengthen sustainable UHC mechanisms ensuring access to early diagnosis and timely quality care for those living with these conditions," said Prof. Mucumbitsi.

**Prisca Githuka**, Chairperson of the Cancer Survivors Association of Kenya told the Official Opening Press Conference highlighted the health inequities that persist between countries.

"The cancer care continuum in many lower- and middle-income countries is vastly different to that which people in the global north have access to," said Githuka. "In countries where essential medicines like morphine are taken for granted, it is almost impossible to imagine going through cancer treatment without it. And it is even more difficult to imagine simply not having access to treatments like radiotherapy or chemotherapy. I believe it is my job to tell that side of the story and to send the message that the lives of people in the global south are just as valuable as those in the north."

"Putting a human face to NCDs is a dignified and powerful way to draw the attention of both the community at large and decision makers. At the same time, creating a space within the NCD response for people living with NCDs ensures that decisions made and solutions implemented are responding to the true needs of those who are meant to benefit from them," she said.

In Rwanda and across Africa, efforts to improve quality of life for people living with severe noncommunicable diseases have been driven by collaboration between country governments, NGOs, the private sector, philanthropic organizations, and other stakeholders. PEN-Plus is an integrated care model focused on alleviating the burden of NCDs such as type 1 diabetes (T1D), childhood heart disease and sickle cell disease by increasing access to high-quality chronic care. Implementation is led by ministries of health, with technical support from the NCDI Poverty Network and NGO partners. In Rwanda, the Ministry of Health has scaled the model nationwide, training hundreds of health workers to diagnose and treat severe NCDs. All 47 member states of the WHO African region have endorsed the model as their official strategy to address severe NCDs across the continent.

**Dr Gina Agiostratidou**, Program Director at the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, focused on the importance of partnerships in mobilising investment to accelerate progress in the NCD response.

"Philanthropy will always play an important part in global health. Regardless of the shifting environment, Helmsley remains committed to driving sustainable, life-changing progress for people living with NCDs around the world. Today, we are proud to support the Forum as a critical platform for community-driven impact," said Dr Agiostratidou.

"In these turbulent times, we need bold leadership that embraces solidarity over division, co-creation over isolation, and collaboration over self-interest," said **Katie Dain**. "The NCD community is impatient for change, and this year's Forum and upcoming High-Level Meeting is our opportunity to make it happen."

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**Further Information:**

**Keynote speakers confirmed include:**

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- **Princess Padmaja Kumari Parmar**, founder Friends of Mewar, Global Ambassador, Breakthrough T1D
- **Katie Dain**, CEO, NCD Alliance • **Dr Joseph Mucumbitsi**, Chairperson, Rwanda NCD Alliance
- **Dr Joseph Mucumbitsi**, Chairperson, Rwanda NCD Alliance
- **Prof. Claude Mambo Muvunyi**, Director General, Rwanda Biomedical Centre
- **Dr Gina Agiostratidou**, Program Director, Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust
- **Ms Jumana Qamruddin**, Global Program Lead, Healthcare Delivery, Health Nutrition and Population Global Practice, World Bank
- **Dr Gladwell Gathecha**, Acting Head of Division of Non-communicable Diseases, Ministry of Health, Kenya
- **Dr Githinji Gitahi**, CEO of AMREF Health Africa
- **Dr Mary Efua Commeh**, Acting Programme Manager for NCDs, Ghana Health Service
- **Dr Kouamivi Agboyibor**, Technical Officer, Non Communicable Disease , WHO AFRO
- **Prof Claude Mambo Muvunyi**, Director General, Rwanda Biomedical Centre
- **Mr Itete Karagire**, Monitoring and Evaluation Expert, East Africa Community (EAC) Secretariat

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**Post Date:** Thursday, 13 February, 2025

**Tags:** [Time to lead](#) [5]

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**Search Keywords:** Time to lead, Global NCD Alliance Forum



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**Image:**

[1] <https://forum.ncdalliance.org/>

[2] <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>

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