

UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage falls short of commitments

Language English



NCD Alliance STATEMENT

22 September 2023, Geneva – Health this week was at the top of political leaders’ agendas with three UN High-Level Meetings (HLM) focused on universal health coverage (UHC); pandemic preparedness, prevention and response (PPPR); and tuberculosis. Despite this unprecedented health focus and strong statements by many governments, commitments made fell short of the concrete actions and targets needed. The HLM on UHC coincided with the closing of the Global Week for Action on NCDs (GW4A)[1] [1] which saw more engagement by both civil society and government sectors than ever before[2] [2].

“This year has demonstrated that people are ready for change. More people than ever are taking action and demanding equality, demanding that governments put population and planetary health first - what we need now is to see our leaders respond with bold action,” said Katie Dain, CEO of the NCD Alliance.

Health advocates were disappointed that the political declaration from the HLM on UHC did not make stronger commitments to addressing inequalities and financial risk protection, and lacked specific targets on health spending. There was also a missed opportunity for the declaration to recognize people living with health conditions, including noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), as a vulnerable group. This would have supported better access to care, especially during health emergencies. 60-90% of COVID-19 deaths are estimated to be from people living with NCDs.

“This reinforces the importance of scaling up NCD prevention and control as part of pandemic response,” said President of Guyana, Dr Mohammed Irfaan Ali on behalf of the CARICOM[3] [3] at the HLM on PPPR on Wednesday.

One positive outcome from the HLM on UHC is that key components that define UHC remain intact. There is also more recognition of NCDs and mental health being integral to UHC compared to four years ago at the first HLM on UHC. This is most notable on the role of prevention and the continuum of NCD care in health benefits packages and

including NCDs within comprehensive approaches and integrated service delivery.

A group of heads of state and government met on the sidelines of the HLM on UHC, at the invitation of the president of Ghana, to speak specifically about NCDs, illustrating the connections between NCDs, pandemic preparedness, and sustainable development. Many leaders, such as those from Barbados, Timor Leste, and Mauritius, demonstrated their commitment to take the NCD agenda further, both in their own countries and at the highest level as we approach the UN HLM on NCDs taking place in 2025.

The NCD Alliance encourages governments to build on the political declaration on UHC in the lead up to the UN HLM on NCDs in 2025, calling for stronger commitments to NCD prevention, care and investment. We look forward to collaborating with leaders to move from commitments to action, to make NCDs a priority, to put people first.

“Millions of people living with NCDs like diabetes, heart disease and cancer are driven into or further into poverty by out-of-pocket healthcare costs each year, and millions more are simply unable to access care at all,” said Ms Dain. “These diseases deepen inequality and are major drivers of poverty that is passed from generation to generation. There is no sustainable development without action on NCDs.”

For more information, contact:

Jimena Márquez Donaher, Communications Director, NCD Alliance jmarquez@ncdalliance.org [4]

Mobile: +34 686 160 725

About the NCD Alliance

The NCD Alliance (NCDA) is a registered non-governmental organisation (NGO) based in Geneva, Switzerland, dedicated to supporting a world free from preventable suffering, disability and death caused by noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Founded in 2009, NCDA brings together a unique network of over 400 members in more than 60 countries into a respected, united and credible global civil society movement. The movement is unified by the cross-cutting nature of common risk factors including unhealthy diets, alcohol, tobacco, air pollution and physical inactivity, and the system solutions for chronic NCDs such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic lung disease, diabetes, mental health and neurological disorders.

[1] [5] The [Global Week for Action on NCDs](#) [6] unites the NCD movement each year under a specific theme, combining efforts to raise awareness of the NCD burden and increase health and equality globally.

[2] [7] This year, the GW4A kicked off with a high-level event organized by the NCD Alliance, World Health Organization and World Diabetes Foundation, which was attended by over 500 people.

[3] [8] The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is an intergovernmental organisation that is a political and economic union of 15 member states throughout the Americas and Atlantic Ocean.

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