

20<sup>th</sup> April, 2020

**His Excellency.**

**President of the Republic of Ghana**

**Jubilee House-Accra**

**Dear Your Excellency, President Akufo-Addo,**

**MEETING THE NEEDS AND CARE OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH NON-COMMUNICABLE  
DISEASES IN THE ERA OF COVID-19**

Ghana has joined hands with countries around the world in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic as declared by the World Health Organization (WHO). Currently, Ghana has a total of 1,042 recorded cases as of April 19 with 9 deaths and 99 recoveries.

It is evident that people living with non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and adults aged 60 years and above as well as those with underlying health conditions are highly vulnerable to Covid-19. People living with NCDs such as cancer, chronic respiratory diseases, and kidney diseases among others are in a compromised situation due to their weak immune system and are more likely to get poor outcomes of Covid-19 infection.

Currently, 94,400 people are killed by NCDs in Ghana according to WHO NCD Progress Monitor, 2020.

**Access to routine medicines during Covid-19**

Mr. President, majority of people living with non-communicable diseases (PLWNCDs) need long term medications to help control their conditions. However, not all can be acquired from the various community health centers in the country except in general and 'big' and private hospitals. The shortage or absence of these routine medicines at the community health centers means people living with these conditions will have to travel to higher facility centers to acquire them, incurring extra costs and greater exposure to the COVID-19 infection.

It is important for government to urgently find alternative ways to ensure that PLWNCDs have uninterrupted supply of their routine medication at the various health centers especially the community health centers across the country.

Furthermore, the Ghana NCD Alliance and people living with NCDs calls on the Government through the Ministry of Health and the National Health Insurance Authority to ensure that the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) covers the entire cost of medication needed by PLWNCDs in this covid-19 era and beyond. Currently, the NHIS covers part of the cost however, we believe that a full



package will go a long way in helping PLWNCDs get access to quality health care, protect them from

catastrophic out of pocket expenditures and limit their exposure to the environment.

Further, we call on government to:

- Arrange for 2-3 months of uninterrupted medicines supply for people living with NCDs to minimize disruption in routine treatment and care.
- Ensure adequate stock of medicines required to control NCDs are available at public, private and community health centers.
- Ensure the NHIS fully covers cost of NCDs treatment
- Ensure appropriate triaging, adequate treatment, care and safety measures for people living with NCDs who test positive for COVID-19
- Provide mechanisms to health workers to conduct remote consultations to minimize hospital and clinic visits
- Minimize waiting times and ensure physical distancing guidelines, particularly in clinics and health centres which people with underlying conditions, including NCDs need to access during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Issue clear guidelines for protection of people with underlying conditions, including NCDs during the COVID-19 outbreak to curb misinformation and address heightened stigma and discrimination in communities
- Intensify awareness campaigns to allay fear, anxiety and isolation among people living with NCDs, particularly those with mental health condition
- Intensify public education especially in remote and hard to reach communities with the support of community health workers and Civil Society such as the GhNCDA.

### **Strengthen NCD prevention during the COVID-19 pandemic**

The WHO has said “Any kind of tobacco smoking is harmful to the bodily systems including the cardiovascular and respiratory systems. Covid-19 can also harm these systems”. It further states that “second-hand tobacco smoke contributes to heart diseases, cancer and other diseases causing additional 1.2 million deaths annually. A recent article published in the New England Journal of Medicine by Chinese researchers also reported that tobacco smokers are highly at the risk of progressing to the severe stage of Covid-19 than non-tobacco smokers.

Mr. President, countries like South Africa and Sri Lanka among others in the wake of Covid-19 have taken steps to ban the sale of tobacco and alcohol as one of the steps to reduce the spread and protect people living with NCDs and their citizens; a step worth emulating by Ghana.



Mr. President, the GhNCDA and people living with NCDs wish to reiterate the need to ban sale unhealthy commodities such the sale of alcohol and tobacco in the fight against Covid-19. These products have dangerous impact on our health i.e. weakening the immune system and increases our NCDs burden. These products are regarded as non-essential elements in the fight against Covid-19.

Your Excellency, your Government has taken many bold steps to contain the spread of the virus but these efforts will not be completed if people with chronic diseases especially persons with NCDs including those with mental health conditions and older people are not protected from exposure to the covid-19 bearing in mind that they have numerous needs.

**Investment in health must be the utmost priority of government during and beyond the era of Covid-19**

The GhNCDA as part of its efforts to complement government, is providing awareness and education to PLWNCDs and the public on social distance, stigma and discrimination, hand washing and use of hand sanitizers via media and social media channels and at the community levels.

We, the Ghana NCD Alliance are counting on you to prioritize the health of your citizens especially the most vulnerable under the circumstances, this way Ghana will be attaining a critical aspect of the Sustainable Development Goals (**on Goal 3 -Health and Wellbeing- where we are all aware of the key role you are playing as one of the Co-chair of Group of Eminent Advocate**) and the Universal Health Coverage.

We are available for further discussion on this important national and global crisis.

Thank you

Yours sincerely



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