



STATEMENT BY PERSONS LIVING WITH NON-COMMUNICABLE DISEASES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN KENYA

Today, we, the Persons Living with Non-Communicable Diseases (PLWNCDs) in Kenya, launch our key priority ASKS of the Government of Kenya during COVID-19 pandemic response. Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) include cancers, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and mental health disorders and account for 55% of hospital admissions, 50% of hospital deaths and 33% of total deaths.

The adaptation of health systems, by the government, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 has negatively impacted PLWNCDs. Access to NCD treatment and care has been compromised by closure of NCD clinics as the focus has shifted to COVID-19; supply chains have been disrupted; and transportation costs have increased. Reports of shortages and stock out of essential NCD medicines and commodities in public health facilities have been reported. PLWNCDs are experiencing disruptions in NCD healthcare services which puts them at higher risk of developing life-threatening NCD complications and severe COVID-19.

The World Health Organisation and the Ministry of Health have emphasized that persons PLWNCDs and adults aged 60 years and above, are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 infection. Persons with inadequately controlled NCDs are at high risk of severe COVID-19 with poor outcomes. While we acknowledge the efforts by the Ministry of Health during the COVID-19 pandemic, this statement highlights what needs to be done to ensure protection and well-being of PLWNCDs.

We, persons living with NCDs, are at a higher risk of severe complications and death from COVID-19. Given the evidence linking NCDs and COVID-19, the Government must urgently address the underlying drivers of the NCD pandemic that is fueling COVID-19 mortality.

We, therefore, ask the Government, and related agencies, to prioritise the needs and care of PLWNCDs by placing them at the center of the COVID-19 response in Kenya.

- We ask the Government to build a resilient supply chain of essential NCD medicines and commodities; ensure their availability, affordability, and accessibility at primary health facilities; and support access by PLWNCDs who cannot physically visit pharmacies or hospitals.
- We ask the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection through the National Emergency Response Committee to include PLWNCDs among the vulnerable

population eligible for the COVID-19 kitty and social protection benefits and clarify the criteria for selection of COVID-19 kitty beneficiaries.

- We request clear guidelines on how PLWNCDs can safely attend the re-opened clinics across all levels of the health facilities in Kenya. The use of telemedicine for continued care and management at public and private facilities should be embraced. The Government should also facilitate emergency transport for vulnerable PLWNCDs who must access healthcare in a hospital e.g. chemotherapy, radiotherapy, or dialysis patients.
- We ask the Government to ensure continuous education of healthcare providers on triaging and best practices for management of NCD related emergencies and respond to PLWNCDs as a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic.

With Kenya easing restrictions, we ask the Government to inform the public of the availability of services in these clinics and encourage positive health seeking behaviours. The Government should also de-stigmatise and build public confidence in the COVID-19 response measures to reassure PLWNCDs of their safety whilst attending these clinics.

We acknowledge the long road to recovery post COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya. We reiterate our request to the Government and all relevant stakeholders to put persons living with NCDs at the center of the COVID-19 response in Kenya. This is the time we need each other to continue the good fight and survive the COVID-19 pandemic.

End.

Notes for Editor

1. *NCD Caucus*

The Caucus of Patient Led Organisations under the NCD Alliance of Kenya (CoPLO-NCDAK) brings together Representatives of these organisations for the advancement of the cause of PLWNCDs in Kenya through Advocacy, Lobbying and sharing of lived experiences. Media Contact: +254-725 706455 Lea Kilenga or +254- 722 804992 John Gikonyo.

2. *NCD Alliance of Kenya*

The Non-Communicable Diseases Alliance of Kenya (NCDAK) is the national coordinating body for NGOs, Civil society organizations, and patient lead groups and all players working on various aspects of NCD control. www.ncdak.org. Phone Contact: +254-757-9503-87.

