

Fourth World Health Organization (WHO) Forum on alcohol, drugs and addictive behaviours
24th June

Statement for the opening session

Distinguished delegates,

As we approach the fourth UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs and Mental Health this September 25th, NCD Alliance urges Member States to take bold action – including on alcohol and commercial determinants of health – by prioritizing people’s health over profit.

Alcohol remains a major risk factor for NCDs, including mental health conditions. Yet policy responses are lagging, and commercial narratives often downplay its harms, shifting responsibility onto individuals, rather than putting emphasis on the systemic drivers. Moreover, evidence shows there is no completely safe level of alcohol consumption, but public and political awareness remains low.

Two key messages ahead of September. First, the Political Declaration must reflect the real risks by not employing the misleading term “harmful use of alcohol”. Second, the High-Level Meeting must be followed by strong national policies.

Such a regulatory package should include labelling policies, as outlined in Appendix 3 of the Global NCD Action Plan. People have the right to know about the risks of alcohol use. We commend Ireland’s leadership and urge for the swift and full implementation of its pioneering alcohol labelling law, which would serve as a national milestone and set a powerful precedent for other countries.

In times of shrinking fiscal space, alcohol taxes are amongst the most cost-effective yet underutilized tools for improving health, equity and revenue. Governments must also uphold the commitment to increase alcohol taxes in line with WHO recommendations, supporting the related target in the draft Political Declaration.

Additionally, alcohol marketing, including digital marketing, must be banned or comprehensive restricted, protecting especially vulnerable populations including children, to denormalise its consumption as an unhealthy product.

We call on government NCD and alcohol leads to work closely with Ministries of Foreign Affairs to ensure strong, evidence-based commitments on alcohol are included in the Political Declaration. This is essential to achieve the global target of reducing NCD premature mortality.

Thank you.

Word Count: 303