

**The NCD Alliance Summary and Analysis of the
Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of NCDs**
5 October 2011

UN Member States unanimously adopted the Political Declaration on the Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases on Monday 19 September 2011 during the opening of the High-level Meeting (HLM) on NCDs at the UN in New York.

The NCD Alliance (NCDA) closely followed the drafting of the Political Declaration, advocating for specific NCD policy “asks” to ensure Member States produced the most comprehensive and effective document possible. While not all NCDA asks were included in the Declaration, it provides a strong foundation that will accelerate international efforts to prevent and control NCDs and provide a roadmap for action on NCDs worldwide.

Why a Political Declaration?

Although Member States committed to drafting an “action-oriented outcomes document” in the December 2010 modalities resolution (A/Res/65/L.50), it was decided over the course of negotiations to instead produce a Political Declaration. While not binding under international law, a Political Declaration is considered to be one of the most powerful tools within the UN for international cooperation and action. The document outlines how Member States intend to prevent and control NCDs on the national and international level.

This Declaration is the direct result of years of global health advocacy and international policy initiatives and is the strongest call to action for governments to address the global NCD crises to date. It draws from numerous existing UN resolutions, decisions, and agreements, but also sets forth new recommendations and several specific time-bound commitments.

Drafting the Declaration

The Permanent Missions of Jamaica and Luxembourg to the UN in New York jointly facilitated negotiations for the Declaration over the course of July and August 2011. Most Member States, though not all, negotiated as part of a bloc (e.g. EU, G77). A brief recess was called in the middle of August in order for Member States to work toward finding consensus on contentious issues. Negotiations re-convened on 1 September, with Member States reaching agreement on a final draft text on 7 September 2011.

The Final Political Declaration

Of the 13 pages of the final Political Declaration, three are devoted to the scale of the problem and acknowledging NCDs as a development issue, with linkages to other global development challenges, and the inadequacy of resourcing and political commitment to date. A further seven pages are devoted to commitments.

Below is a summary and analysis of the key themes of the Declaration.

A Global Development Issue

The Political Declaration acknowledges NCDs as one of the “major challenges for development in the 21st century,” and a threat to existing international development goals (e.g. the MDGs). NCDs threaten economic and social development and are directly linked to other developmental challenges, such as maternal and child health, climate change, and infectious diseases. NCDs and their risk factors lead to increased economic burden on individuals, households, and communities and lead to loss of productivity and economic output.

Goals and Targets

An overarching goal of reducing NCD mortality and a set of time-bound targets is missing from the Declaration. The Declaration has postponed the development of voluntary global NCD targets until 2012 (see below).

Diseases and Risk Factors

The Declaration acknowledges the four main non-communicable diseases as cancer, diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and cardiovascular disease. These NCDs share four common risk factors: tobacco use, the harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets, and physical inactivity. It also states that mental and neurological disorders, including Alzheimer’s disease, and renal, oral, and eye diseases, also contribute to the NCD burden and would benefit from NCD interventions.

Prevention

The Declaration places strong emphasis on prevention as the “cornerstone” of the response to NCDs, namely through reducing exposure to risk factors and their determinants. Key measures include:

- Reducing tobacco use, including the acceleration of the implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)
- Creating health-promoting environments, including healthy workplaces
- Empowering individuals to make healthy choices
- Focusing on health education and health literacy, particularly early in life
- Advancing the implementation of the WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity, and Health and the WHO Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful use of Alcohol
- Promoting interventions to reduce salt, sugar, and saturated fats in foods
- Eliminating industrially-produced trans fats in foods
- Promoting the implementation of WHO’s recommendations on the marketing of unhealthy foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children

A highlight of the Declaration is the acknowledgement of the importance of increasing taxes to reduce tobacco consumption. However, language on curbing the harmful use of alcohol is inadequate, with no references to measures like increasing the price or reducing the availability of alcohol. Additionally, the language on the marketing of unhealthy foods to children is weak.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Language in the Declaration states that greater priority be given to surveillance, early detection, screening, diagnosis, and treatment of NCDs. Improving access to safe, affordable, effective, and quality medicines and technologies is highlighted. Access to these medicines and technologies should also be sustainable. The use of affordable medicines, including generics, should be promoted, in addition to improved access to preventative, curative, palliative, and rehabilitative services.

The Declaration includes language on the promotion of access to comprehensive and cost-effective prevention, care, and treatment through the full use of the trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS) flexibilities.

Health Systems

The Declaration recognizes the importance of a well-functioning health system to deliver care to people with NCDs. It recognizes the importance of universal coverage in national health systems, especially through primary healthcare and social protection mechanisms. The Declaration also includes commitments to promote training and retention of health workers.

Indigenous Populations

The Declaration includes specific commitments on indigenous populations, which is significant considering the high prevalence of NCDs in these communities. It encourages the involvement of indigenous peoples and communities in the development, implementation and evaluation of NCD prevention and control policies, plans and programmes.

Political Leadership

In order to effectively prevent and control NCDs, governments should consider multisectoral approaches to health, including health-in-all-policies and whole-of-government approaches. National, regional, provincial, and local capacities must be strengthened. Government should also recognize the contributions and important role played by other relevant stakeholders, including civil society, academia, the media, and the private sector, where appropriate.

Resources

While the Declaration recognizes that resources devoted to dealing with NCDs are not commensurate with the magnitude of the problem, it falls short of any concrete commitments. Member States are encouraged to investigate options for potential sources of funding and pursue sustainable, nationally-drive, cost-effective, and comprehensive responses to NCDs. The Declaration does specify bilateral and multilateral channels, which to date have been limited for NCDs, as well as the development of innovative long-term financing approaches.

Development Assistance

The Declaration acknowledges the importance of international cooperation and assistance in NCD prevention and control, particularly in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). It encourages the inclusion of NCDs in development cooperation agendas and initiatives, and urges international organizations to provide technical assistance and capacity building for NCDs to developing countries.

The Declaration also encourages the quality of development aid to be enhanced through harmonization and alignment with recipient country national priorities.

Research and Development

The Declaration commits to strengthening capacity for, and increasing support for, research and development for all aspects of NCD prevention and control; as well as its translation into action.

Follow-up Actions

The Political Declaration does contain four major time-bound follow-up actions for Member States, WHO, and the UN Secretary-General to take into consideration:

1 National NCD Plans

One of the few targets in the Declaration commits governments to establish or strengthen multisectoral National Policies and Plans on NCDs by 2013. Ideally, this target will accelerate commitment to existing plans and encourage countries without national NCD plans to establish them within the given timeframe.

2 Goals and Targets

Led by WHO, Member States have until the end of 2012 to develop a comprehensive global monitoring framework for NCDs, including a set of indicators, and a set of voluntary global targets. It is expected that a draft list of targets will be reviewed by member states at the 130th WHO Executive Board taking place in Geneva in January 2011, which will then be tabled at World Health Assembly taking place in Geneva in May 2011 for consideration by all member states

3 NCD Partnership

The Declaration lacks explicit plans for a high-level NCD partnership initiative involving UN agencies, governments, and civil society. Such a mechanism would coordinate and drive follow-up actions. Instead, the Declaration requests the UN Secretary-General to submit to Member States (via the General Assembly) options for such a UN partnership by the end of 2012.

4 Reports and Meetings

The Declaration charges the Secretary-General with reporting back to the 68th session of the General Assembly (2013-2014) on the progress achieved in the implementation of the recommendations and actions outlined within the Declaration. Equally important is the agreement to hold a comprehensive review and assessment of progress achieved in the prevention and control of NCDs in 2014. It is up to civil society to ensure that this meeting is held at the highest level, as it will be critical for reaffirming the need for NCDs to be integrated into future internationally agreed development goals, particularly when the current MDGs end in 2015.