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WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION SOUNDS GLOBAL ALARM ON CHRONIC DISEASE

New report emphasises “urgent need for action”

London, 04 October 2005 – The Oxford Health Alliance commends the World Health Organisation for their latest report, *Preventing Chronic Diseases: a vital investment*. It offers compelling evidence that a global pandemic is now underway. By establishing the scale of a crisis that disproportionately affects low- and middle-income countries, the report conclusively establishes chronic diseases as the major cause of death on the planet. Equally significantly, the report juxtaposes the disastrous – and under-appreciated – effects of chronic diseases on national economies with the availability of cost effective, inexpensive solutions.

“What is particularly welcome” said John Bell, Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford University, “is the definitive statement that healthy diets, regular physical activity and avoidance of tobacco use can save millions of lives and avert a true pandemic”. Bell heads the Board of the Oxford Health Alliance, an action-oriented coalition whose annual review, ‘A World at Risk’ picks up where the WHO report leaves off.

Dr. Stig Pramming is the Executive Director of the Alliance, which focuses on the three risk factors responsible for over half of all deaths worldwide. “Dr Lee has called the costs of inaction ‘clear and unacceptable,’ and this report speaks of saving 36 million people in the next ten years alone. No one can say again that we were not warned – this is a call for immediate action before it is too late.”

Yale University’s Professor of Global Health Derek Yach, also an Oxford Alliance board member, was one of the architects of the WHO Framework on Tobacco Control and the Global Strategy on Diet and Physical Activity. “The World Health Organisation’s strong call for action has been heard by the OHA. We now have 20 countries developing action-oriented research projects aimed at reversing harmful trends in risks to health. But that is not enough. The report needs a response from the major donor and financial community. Investing in chronic disease prevention will yield huge dividends for health and economies, especially in countries like China and India.”

In calling for immediate action, the WHO report is likely to accelerate the activities of the Oxford Health Alliance, whose diverse members are working together on many fronts, including community-based initiatives designed to further the evidence base for intervention. The Alliance's Annual Review will be unveiled at the organisation's impending meeting at Yale University on October 30th.

NOTE TO EDITORS: The report 'Preventing Chronic Diseases: a vital investment' is being made available by the WHO (with embargo until Wednesday, 5 October, 0001 GMT) in .pdf format at: http://www.who.int/chp/chronic_disease_report/media/

Username: mediaguest
Password: globalepidemic

For questions, please contact:

US:

Derek Yach *Board Member, Oxford Health Alliance*
Tel: 203.747.4277

Laurie Branscombe *Associate Director of Communications, Oxford Health Alliance*
Tel: 212.677.0001

UK:

Stig Pramming *Executive Director, Oxford Health Alliance*
Tel: + 45.3079.6534

Jo Matthews *Associate Director of Communications, Oxford Health Alliance*
Tel: + 44.7921.284357

The Oxford Health Alliance enables experts and activists from different backgrounds to collaborate in order to raise awareness and change behaviours, policies and perspectives at every level of society. Alliance members from around the world include leading academics, activists and corporate executives, patients' rights advocates, doctors, nurses and others, all of whom share a sense of urgency about the worldwide epidemic of chronic disease. Our first goal is to raise awareness among influencers and educate critical decision-makers so that the pressing case for preventative measures can advance, and we can begin to combat chronic disease.

For more information please consult www.oxha.org.