Addressing childhood obesity

The WHO European Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI): How a dynamic surveillance system triggered actions that are reducing childhood obesity in Europe

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Excellencies, delegates, nutrition advocates, and friends,

I am indeed very pleased to join you in this evening’s side event to discuss the importance of data for triggering action on obesity.

Thank you to the organizers, the Governments of Italy, Portugal, and the Russian Federation for having brought us together today.

About one in three deaths is accounted for by unhealthy diet and different forms of malnutrition.

Action and investments are critical and urgent.

Good nutrition is central to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 2 – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture – and it is a decisive enabler of SDG 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Obesity is a growing epidemic that we are finding very difficult to stop.

Low- and middle-income countries are affected, even while they are affected by under-nutrition.

In fact, that is where the obesity epidemic has grown the most.

Public awareness on the obesity challenge depends on our capacity to provide good data in a timely fashion with adequate level of disaggregation.

The Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative has been a remarkable success in the European Region.

WHO hopes the rest of the world will replicate it.
Good data will be the trigger of policy response.

Obesity needs to be prevented and managed.

As clearly indicated by the report of the WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity, obesity starts very early in life.

This is why early action is needed, with promotion, protection and support of breastfeeding, and bold action to reshape food environments for children and to allow them to be physically active.

I take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Health of Portugal for having hosted the launch of the Global Action Plan of Physical Activity.

Health workers need to be able to identify and manage child overweight in the same way that they are able to identify and manage undernutrition.

This is a new reality.

In April 2016 the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2016-2025 the United Nations Decade of Action on Nutrition.

Thank you to Italy and the Russian Federation for their leadership in co-sponsoring both resolutions in the Decade of Action: the 2016 resolution and this year’s resolution.

The aim of the Decade of Action on Nutrition is to accelerate the implementation of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) commitments, achieve the global nutrition and diet-related NCD targets by 2025, and contribute to the realization of the SDGs by 2030.

WHO is going to do its part.

The reduction of obesity is one of five nutrition indicators that WHO has included in its Programme of Work 2019-2023.

We also have a multi-level, fit-for-purpose nutrition strategy—Ambition and Action in Nutrition 2016-2025—which has a clear mission: “A world free from all forms of malnutrition where all people achieve health and well-being”.

WHO is committed to work with governments, as well as all actors in society, keeping in mind that public health is the priority.

I look forward to working with all of you towards the ambitious and challenging task to stop and reverse the epidemic of obesity.

Thank you.