Feedback on WHO Draft global action plan to promote physical activity –

Web-based consultation

The Advisory Council on Health Lifestyles, an inter-sectoral council appointed under the Healthy Lifestyle Promotion and Care of Non-Communicable Diseases Act (Laws of Malta Chap 550) has reviewed the Draft WHO global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030 and agrees that this draft document presents an appropriate and comprehensive view of how physical activity should be addressed.

The Council notes that that this global action plan acknowledges “the complex interaction of social, cultural, economic and contextual factors that influence levels of physical activity in a population”. While endorsing such a comprehensive approach to empower all individuals, families and communities to increase physical activity, it focuses on community well-being, sustainable community development and the attainment of a higher quality of life for all. It is positively noted that through such focus, this action plan also gives due attention to reducing social and health inequalities and bestows due priority to the inclusion of inactive, vulnerable and marginalised groups.

This action plan’s multi-faceted and inclusive approach underpinned by the eight cross cutting guiding principles (life course approach; equity; empowerment of peoples, families and communities; human-based approach; evidence based practice; cross sectoral engagement and partnership for joint action; policy coherence; universal health coverage) is also reflected in Malta’s National Strategic Policy for Poverty Reduction and for Social Inclusion 2014-2024. Consequently, the action plan recognises the socio-cultural impacts and the economic determinants on the level of physical activity both in the overview as well as in the proposed actions, particularly when addressing the disparity in participation by gender, age, disability, economic status, geography and other socio-demographic characteristics.

It is positive to observe that the action plan seeks to yield the benefits of joint actions by putting a focus on strengthening stakeholder involvement and engagement at global, regional, national and local levels. Indeed, the correlating statement mentioned in multiple instances in the action plan “No one single policy action will be sufficient to increasing physical activity” calls for coordinated policy actions that not only contribute towards attaining the main objective of increasing physical activity, but also promote social justice, social cohesion and inclusion. Involving all stakeholders in the implementation of the action plan also ensures making maximum use of resources in, through and across various settings, such as “in schools, workplaces, health care settings, and local communities” as stated in the action plan. Indeed, the three broad domains that classify the policy actions - (i) work; (ii) active transport; and (iii) leisure – are seen as contributing towards attaining efficiency and effectiveness by fully utilising the resources available.

We are pleased to note that the comprehensive approach adopted by this action plan upholds the different specific country contexts and challenges, moving away from a one size fits all approach to an approach that aspires to pursue the availability of multiple effective policy options which vary according to each country’s context and resources. Hence, whilst considering the proposed actions

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1 The purpose of this Act is to establish and ensure an inter-ministerial lifelong approach favouring physical education and healthy balanced diets for a healthy lifestyle reducing the level of non-communicable diseases throughout all age groups.
and indicators in the plan as comprehensive and necessary, a fundamental consideration binding to the principle of subsidiarity is to be ensured. In this way, the consideration of the implementation of the listed actions in this global action plan would ensure that such actions do not pose additional administrative burden on Member States’ resources, and that the latter are enabled to continue to define their mode of dialogue and involvement with stakeholders in the spirit of the social Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

Overall and most importantly, this draft global action plan on physical activity provides the necessary leadership and systems to “ensure equitable, safe and universal, access by all populations, of all ages and abilities” in multiple settings. By adopting a health in all policies approach, a focus on equity and recognition of the social determinants of health, this action plan is regarded as promoting and safeguarding the rights of all persons as well as contributing towards achieving good governance, coordination and joint action at all levels.

Malta is developing a Health Enhancing Physical Activity Action Plan and appreciates the support provided by WHO.