Honorable chair, distinguished delegates. My name is Diana Vaca McGhie, and I am representing the American Heart Association, the United States’ oldest, largest voluntary health organization whose mission is to build healthier lives, free of cardiovascular disease and stroke. For over 90 years, the American Heart Association has been a leader in cardio-vascular science and care, including science-based treatment guidelines, research, and advocacy.

Cardiovascular disease is responsible for nearly half of global deaths from NCDs. The growing national burden and the persistent disparities in the rates of cardiovascular diseases and other NCDs, requires us to commit to improving population health while reducing premature mortality due to NCDs. This is especially true for our world’s children who are increasingly exhibiting prediabetes, hypertension and other risk factors for CVD and stroke at an earlier age.

The Association joins the World Heart Federation and the NCD Alliance, in calling for political leadership to accelerate the NCD response. We urge countries to prioritize the set of the World Health Organization’s Best Buys and other recommended cost-effective interventions for the prevention and control of NCDs and their risk factors.

The Association takes this opportunity to reaffirm the report of the WHO’s Independent High-Level Commission on NCDs, Time To Deliver, that calls for resources to be scaled up in support of the prevention, treatment and care of NCDs. National governments have a responsibility to consider how chronic disease prevention and control will be integrated within their health systems, especially in the context of universal health coverage that is a clarion call for all of us in pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goal’s vision ‘to leave no one behind.’

We note however our disappointment that the report did not call out the commercial determinants of health as a major obstacle to progress. Let me be clear, unhealthy commodity industries continue to use tactics that can undermine the role of governments to protect the public health of their citizens. This past week alone we witnessed in the State of California the tactics of Big Soda to protect profits over the health of our kids and communities. A bill that was signed (SB 872/AB1838) that takes away the ability of cities in the state to decide for themselves on a sugary drink tax. This bill is a gift to the beverage industry at the expense of kids, families and local control. We cannot afford for this to happen in other cities and nations in the world. We must expand our efforts to both monitor and respond to industry interference in the formulation and implementation of sugar and tobacco taxes.

We cannot stress enough the important role governments have to implement a range of policies that can improve diet quality important to public health. The WHO has provided guidance through the technical packages of the Global Hearts Initiative and REPLACE. These and others aim to support governments to take actionable steps to regulate nutrients in the food supply such as sodium and added sugars as well as limiting trans fats. National cardiology societies and professional associations, like ours, are playing a role in support of these efforts and invite you to engage with them.

In closing, CVDs and NCDs must continue to be recognized at the highest political level and central to a nation’s development. We thank you for considering our statement and we look forward to working with you towards a successful UN High Level Meeting on NCDs in September.

Civil Society Hearing 2018