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Using the global UN Initiative to Eliminate Cervical Cancer as a springboard to help countries scale up their national NCD responses

Multi-stakeholder Panel 2:
Opportunities and challenges in engaging Governments, civil society and the private sector at the global, regional and national levels to promote multi-sectoral partnerships for the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases and the promotion of healthy lifestyles

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today and to bring our perspective at UNFPA to this high-level meeting on non-communicable diseases. NCDs have a significant impact not just on overall health, but specifically on sexual and reproductive health.

- Cancers of the reproductive organs – such as breast and cervical cancer in women and prostate cancer in men – are common;
- Obesity, diabetes and hypertension during pregnancy have impacts on the health of women and infants; and
- Parental smoking, alcohol and other drug use – in both women and men – affects fertility, and foetal, infant and child health.

We know prevention is better than cure. This calls for a holistic approach.

How do we help young people lay the foundation for good health throughout their lives? How do we make sure that they build the judgement and skills to make healthy choices – to eat well, exercise and avoid alcohol, tobacco and other drugs? How do we make sure they have the information and services they need to enjoy healthy sexuality, and later healthy fertility and pregnancies, if and when they choose?

UNFPA promotes this life-course approach, with particular emphasis on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls, women and newborns from the very start of life.

Through the Inter-Agency Task Force on NCDs, we work with WHO and other partners, to promote healthy lifestyles at all ages, maximizing opportunities for everyone to fulfill their
potential. This includes working hand in hand to **end cervical cancer by 2050** through the UN Joint Global Programme on Cervical Cancer Prevention and Control.

As Dr. Tedros said earlier this week: “We have all the tools we need to consign cervical cancer to the history books. Vaccination. Screening. Treatment. Palliative care.”

Yet, 500,000 women each year continue to be affected by this preventable and treatable disease.

UNFPA is supporting countries across all regions to develop national cervical cancer guidelines, cancer screening and treatment programmes and cancer registries to better understand the situation and to address it.

Several of our regional and country offices have undertaken groundbreaking work to support government **“prevent, screen and treat” programmes**, and to **expand HPV vaccination**, through adolescent sexual and reproductive health programmes. These efforts need to be replicated and scaled up in our joint effort to reach every girl, everywhere.

Introduction of the HPV vaccine can be an **entry point for reaching adolescent girls** with other sexual and reproductive health services and information, including contraception. It can also help reach their mothers for secondary prevention of cancer through screening, early detection, and treatment.

Moreover, we can mobilize and build on our successes against cervical cancer to help countries scale up their response to other NCDs.

Sustainable Development Goal 3 provides an overarching framework “**To ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages**”.

This framework for health helps focus our attention. And the presence of all of us here today signifies high-level commitment to addressing NCDs as a leading health issue of our time.

Let’s translate this commitment into resources and action – both through donor support and domestic funding – to tackle these problems.

SDG 17 gives us a framework for partnership between government, civil society, the private sector, development organizations and others. Let’s leverage our respective strengths, roles and responsibilities to address NCDs. This includes working together to address global issues, such as climate change, environmental threats, and food production and consumption, which contribute to NCDs in all countries.
Governments have a central role in creating policies and infrastructure that enable healthy lifestyles.

Civil society mobilization and advocacy can help us identify community champions. Earlier this year I met one such champion – the Jamaican athlete Novlene Williams-Mills, who overcame breast cancer to lead her teammates to multiple track victories. Beyond her inspirational performance on the track, Novlene’s proactive approach to screening and treatment has made her a role model for other cancer survivors and inspired young women to take charge of their health and their futures. We need more Novlenes!

The private sector also has a role to play. Let’s encourage corporate social responsibility and ethical investment. How can we identify win-win commercial solutions that are both healthy and economically viable?

At UNFPA, we are firmly committed to working with our NCD Task Force partners to provide information and policy guidance, based upon the best available evidence, to help Member States scale up their national NCD responses.

We can’t let the gains we have seen in life expectancy and in reduction of communicable disease be stripped away by a rising tide of non-communicable disease.

We know what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Let’s apply this knowledge to bring about protective, forward-looking policies, interventions and infrastructure that promote health and advance a more prosperous and sustainable world for all.

The elimination of cervical cancer is a long-term goal, but the steps taken to put countries on the path to elimination will begin saving lives immediately.

UNFPA stands willing to partner with all of you to ensure that every woman, child and adolescent can exercise her right to a healthy, fulfilled life.

Let’s seize this opportunity to make a lasting impact – now and for generations of girls and women to come.