As a health and medical research institute, we would like to take this opportunity to call for recognition of the crucial role academia can play in the NCD response; first, by helping to develop affordable, scalable and sustainable implementation strategies; and second, by providing timely and robust evaluation, generating high-quality evidence and supporting greater accountability.

When leaders gather in September, many prior commitments on NCDs will still not have been implemented. Where the obstacles are technical, academia can play a key role, with experts in implementation science providing critical advice and assistance in identifying appropriate strategies.

We call for implementers, policymakers and those funding interventions to work closely with researchers from the outset to identify appropriate, scalable approaches, especially in relation to health-system strengthening in the local context. Researchers must ensure that results are generated in a timely fashion, and meet the needs of implementers in an agile, flexible way.

Building on WHO’s ‘Best Buys’, academia can also play a crucial role in developing national capacity to undertake health technology assessments, to ensure that scarce resources are directed towards measures that will yield the greatest benefits; as with the Health Intervention and Technology Assessment Programme in Thailand.

In addition, there are aspects of the NCD response where more research is urgently needed; for example, into the unacceptable health disparities between genders. We need to better understand and address the growing body of evidence that shows men and women around the world experience differences in health access, treatment and outcomes. We also need more research into the scale and nature of multimorbidity, often including mental health conditions, and how best to organise health systems in order to provide integrated care.

NCDs represent a major challenge to all dimensions of sustainable human development. While heads of state must take the lead in ensuring urgent, whole-of-government responses, academic institutes also have a crucial role to play.