Think Piece
Why is 2016 a strategically important year for NCDs?

The NCD Crisis: Priorities for 2016

This year will be remembered as a watershed in the global battle against noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Many of the people who will die from cardiovascular diseases or cancer in 2030 are today’s young and middle-aged adults. They are starting their journey towards an untimely death now, unless coordinated action is taken across governments and involving the whole of society.

Over the past five years, an unprecedented political momentum has propelled world leaders to recognize this danger to human development. A set of global goals has been adopted that provide milestones for 2025 and 2030. Heads of State have unanimously committed to a whole-of-society effort to meet this challenge.

This policy commitment is proving inadequate in the face of the challenge. Evidence is growing that the response in countries is uneven and not meeting the lofty goals. National budget investments remain woefully small and fewer funds are being mobilized than needed. There is still a sense of business-as-usual rather than the urgent responses so desperately needed. Policies are drafted, but structures to implement them are scarce.

The challenge is now no longer to only gain political support, but one of investment and implementation. It is no longer one of arguing for greater priority, but one of being held accountable for delivery on agreed outputs and outcomes. It is no longer just proving the benefits of action, but one of reaping the benefits of evidence-based solutions.

The first WHO Global Meeting of National NCD Programme Directors and Managers, together with representatives from WHO at all three levels of the Organization, is being convened in Geneva. The participants at this meeting are the experts directly leading the movement that ensures their countries succeed in meeting the global challenges in 2025 and 2030. They have and must seize this unique opportunity to leave behind a historical legacy as the ones whose leadership, commitment and drive helped halt the epidemic. They need to simultaneously provide effective health services while supporting a movement that draws in all government sectors, academia, civil society, and the private sector behind the prevention and control of NCDs.

The mandate has been provided by the global declarations and reinforced by multiple regional resolutions and instruments. The tools are available in the WHO Global NCD Action Plan 2013-2020.
What remains is to define strategies and plans to connect evidence with action, promises with delivery, policies with implementation.

**Three Strategic Elements**

If we are to reverse the tide, three key elements must be in place by the end of 2017, and all three will be addressed in the global meeting of national NCD Programme Directors and Managers:

1. **Road map on how to attain the nine NCD targets for 2025:** At the first UN High Level Meeting on NCDs in 2011, Member States declared that NCDs constituted a global epidemic which required immediate action to establish the necessary multisector policies and programs to address the growing disease and risk factor burden. At the second UN High-level Meeting on NCDs in 2014, held to review the progress since 2011, Member States recognised that some progress had been made on NCDs, but it was uneven and insufficient. They, therefore, agreed on a road map of four time-bound commitments to address NCDs between 2014 and 2018 in their efforts to contribute to the nine global NCD targets for 2025. Member States will report on progress again at the third UN High-level Meeting on NCDs in 2018.

2. **Road map on how to attain the NCD-related targets in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including how WHO can provide more meaningful support:** Member States will agree on a new set of time-bound commitments on how to address NCDs in their efforts to continue to contribute to the nine global NCD targets for 2025 and the NCD-related SDG targets for 2030. The new set of time-bound commitments starting in 2018 will cover the period until a fourth High-level Meeting (e.g. 2021 or 2022 to be determined by Member States in 2018). The 2018 road map will be negotiated under the auspices of the UN General Assembly in New York through an intergovernmental process, including a preparatory process organized by WHO. Strategic gaps in technical support for the three levels of the WHO (Headquarters, Regional Offices and Country Offices) will also be discussed.

3. **A global community needs to be mobilized to bring together the national NCD programme directors and managers, the front-line workers charged with delivering on this grand challenge.** The world has risen to a similar challenge in 2004 with a global mobilization to respond to the tobacco challenge in the battle to draft and adopt the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). With 180 Parties to the Convention after ten years of its entry into force, the WHO FCTC will continue to serve as an effective legal instrument to contribute the prevention and control of NCDs. A similar coalition of national NCD Programme Directors and Managers, committed to the achievement of the global goals are being invited to come together to exchange experiences, to support each other, but, more importantly, to define their common strategy and their personal commitment to deliver on the goals and to report on concrete results by the third UN High-level Meeting on NCDs in 2018.

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