Blunt UN Secretary-General's report on NCDs decries lack of progress

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"Action to realise the commitments made in 2011 and 2014 is inadequate… the current level of progress is insufficient to meet target 3.4 of the Sustainable Development Goals on non-communicable diseases and… the world has yet to fulfil its promise of implementing measures to reduce the risk of dying prematurely from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment."

That is the blunt assessment of the UN Secretary-General's report on NCDs [1], published last week.

The report's mandate is to set out the progress achieved since 2014 in implementing the outcome document and political declaration of the two meetings to date of the UN General Assembly on NCDs, in 2011 and 2014. The third UNGA meeting on NCDs will be held later this year.

The report points out that: *"Despite the modest financing requirements and the cost-effectiveness of interventions, funding for national programmes from domestic resources and international finance is still grossly insufficient in developing countries. The level of official development assistance to catalyse additional resource mobilisation from other sources has remained close to zero since 2011. While there are undeniable examples of progress, such progress is patchy and will not have a significant impact in terms of reaching target 3.4."*

The report calls for for bolder commitments, and makes recommendations on key NCDA campaign priorities such as urgent need for greater investment for NCDs and scaling-up implementation of WHO's Best Buys, including fiscal measures such as taxation of tobacco, alcohol and sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs). It addresses key barriers to progress such as weak political action at the highest level, consequent lack of policy coherence across government sectors and insufficient integration of NCDs into national plans and strategies for sustainable development, resulting in insufficient resource mobilisation domestically and internationally.

The report also emphasises the need to address commercial determinants of health, including industry interference, but also economic, investment and trade policies, and highlights the importance of upstream policy action, including a much stronger role for the UN system.

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> *currently doing, or they can decide that hundreds of millions of lives are indeed worth saving."* - NCD Alliance CEO Katie Dain.

The NCDA CEO, Katie Dain, described the report as yet another call for UN member states to realise the gargantuan impact of NCDs on the health of their people and economies, and to take action. *"Political leaders around the world have a choice – they can either sleepwalk into a sick future as they are currently doing, or they can decide that hundreds of millions of lives are indeed worth saving,"* Dain added.

The Secretary-General's report notes the NCD Alliance's work as a leading civil society organisation, and includes descriptions of the two NCDA global civil society forums, held in 2015 and 2017 in Sharjah.

The report calls for creativity and innovation to find new ways of overcoming the obstacles to addressing NCDs and of working together. These should "make full use of existing expertise, technology and resources in supporting the implementation of the 'best buys' [2] and other recommended interventions."

"Acting in unity to address non-communicable diseases demands a renewed commitment to work together across sectors and platforms... The bar is raised high for 2018, as progress since 2011 has been insufficient and highly uneven," concludes the report.

Its recommendations include:

- "The WHO best buys and other recommended interventions for NCDs provided the clearest guidance on how to achieve SDG 3.4. Member states are encouraged to recognise this at the highest political level and to prioritise their implementation."
- "Governments are encouraged to strengthen their capacity to analyse the rationale, principles, benefits and risks of engaging with the private sector to contribute to the implementation of national responses to NCDs"
- "Governments are encouraged to create the fiscal space for interventions that have the capacity to generate revenue, such as the taxation of tobacco products, alcohol and sugar-sweetened beverages."

Download the Secretary-General's report [3]

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