
2017 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development asserts commitment to NCDs





A wide view of a session of the three-day ministerial segment of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, convened under the auspices of ECOSOC © UN Photo/Kim Haughton

The [High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) [1] (HLPF) was held from 10 – 19 July at UN Headquarters in New York. This year, the HLPF conducted its first thematic review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the overarching theme Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world. During the first week of the session, Member States held thematic dialogues to discuss SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14, and 17. Each

of the sessions consisted of a presentation by the UN Statistical Division on relevant points from the [Secretary-General's report](#) [2] on progress and a panel discussion, followed by remarks from Member States.

Review of SDG 3

The thematic review of SDG 3 on health highlighted the need to achieve universal health coverage for all, and for multisectoral action beyond the health sector, with a particular focus on environmental determinants of health. Many Member States also stressed the need for reliable information systems; without timely and disaggregated data, we will not be able to address the needs of those farthest behind. Robust data is required to monitor and evaluate programs and policies.

Numerous speakers addressed the need to work outside the health sector since many, if not all, of the determinants of health lie in goals beyond SDG3. Health systems strengthening will only be possible with a whole of government and society approach, as each sector must recognize and address how its outputs affect health and well-being.

"We must look to the future and not just address the present. Air pollution and the environmental causes of diseases will increasingly affect human health. We have to work with other sectors to address those needs." – Michael Myers, Managing Director, Rockefeller Foundation

While participants acknowledged the gains made in addressing infectious diseases and decreasing maternal and newborn mortality, they also recognized that NCDs are on the rise worldwide and that governments and health systems are unprepared to accommodate the far-reaching effects of these diseases.

"Policy coherence also means addressing the commercial determinants of health. Efforts to address NCDs often go against the business models of many industries, but public health must come first." - Marie Hauerslev, VP for External Affairs, IFMSA

This year's HLPF included over 140 side events, several of which focused on health and NCDs. The UNIATF on NCDs convened an event to discuss the Task Force's missions and the benefit to countries that have taken on recommendations. Other relevant events included those focusing on UHC, safe and sustainable mobility, an EAT Forum technical briefing, and numerous events on the need for engaging the private sector for multisectoral and innovative partnerships. The WHO, together with Bloomberg Philanthropies and Uruguay, also held an event to launch the [6th Global Tobacco Control Report](#) [3].

The outcome of the HLPF, a [Ministerial Declaration](#), [4] was adopted Wednesday evening. There was much uncertainty about the Declaration, as several Member States expressed their concern regarding language on trade regulation, foreign occupation, and weak references to gender equality and human rights. Despite this, the Declaration [was adopted](#) [5], and includes a paragraph on achieving SDG 3 on health, including addressing the prevention and control of NCDs and curbing air pollution.

NCD Alliance side event

On Monday 17 July, the NCD Alliance, together with the Permanent Mission of Chile, Permanent Mission of Thailand, and the World Health Organization, convened a side event entitled Bold actions, bold outcomes: protecting and promoting healthy food environments in the SDGs. The event, moderated by Professor Marion Nestle of New York University, focused on country case studies of successful nutrition policies to promote healthy environments. Mr Werner Obermeyer, Deputy Executive Director of the WHO Office at the UN, provided an overview of how nutrition & diet-related NCDs affect achievement of other SDGs, and the global burden of NCDs. Mr Obermeyer also highlighted the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition as an opportunity for all stakeholders to promote and implement health-promoting policies and programs.

Dr Jaime Burrows, Vice Minister of Health, Chile provided an overview of Chile's experience implementing a food labelling law and restrictions on marketing of unhealthy foods to children. The initial data assessing the impact of the food labelling law indicates that over 90% of consumers modified their purchasing behaviour as a result of the warning labels.

"Political will and action are required to combat industry interference to implement policies and programmes for nutrition and NCDs." - Dr Jaime Burrows, Vice Minister of Health, Chile

Dr Phusit Prakongsai, Director, Bureau of International Health, Ministry of Public Health, Thailand, described how Thailand's approach to tackle risk factors for NCDs, including tobacco and alcohol control, multisectoral mechanisms on such as a national food committee, and promotion of taxes on unhealthy commodities. Thailand's UHC budget for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention includes specific attention to addressing NCD risk factors, and the need to quantify not just the economic return on investment, but also the social return on investment of investing in NCD prevention and control.

Following these examples from countries, Dr Roland Kupka, Senior Nutrition Advisor, UNICEF, presented UNICEF's new inclusion of NCDs in its plan, as the agency recognizes it has a role to play in nutrition and NCDs. Dr Kupka highlighted the importance of the first 1,000 days of a child's life, particularly when it comes to the child's nutrition. Without attention to exposure to NCD risk factors, children will have a higher risk of developing an NCD later in life.

Finally, Mr Luis Manuel Encarnación Cruz, Coordinator, Coalition Mexico Salud-hable, spoke on the importance of civil society engagement for successful nutrition policies, especially in the face of strong industry interference. His experience in Mexico highlighted the need for civil society to be vigilant, especially when many industry actors are part of the national commissions convened to shape nutrition policy and regulations. Civil society has an important role to play in holding governments to account and protecting the health of people.

"Civil society pushes governments to strengthen nutrition policy for health promotion and NCD reduction" - Mr Luis Manuel Encarnación Cruz, Coordinator, Coalition Mexico Salud-hable

Nutrition, addressed in SDG2 of the 2030 Agenda, has far-reaching impacts throughout the Agenda beyond health. Protecting and promoting healthy food environments in the face of industry opposition is not easy, but with strong political will, multisectoral partnerships, and civil society engagement, it is possible to implement policies that protect the health and well-being of all people.

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