
Bridgetown Declaration brings high hopes for healthier SIDS



Small Island Developing States Ministerial Conference on Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health 2023

The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Ministerial Conference on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) and Mental Health took place from 14-16 June 2023 to address the disproportionately high burden of NCDs and exposure to various NCD risk factors that SIDS face. The outcome was the adoption of the [Bridgetown Declaration](#) [1] and its clear calls to action.

The NCD Alliance and the Healthy Caribbean Coalition applaud the Declaration and its annexes, in particular for:

- Adopting a SIDS-specific approach to deliver on the Global NCD Compact 2020-2030 action commitments;
- Addressing the commercial determinants of health and climate change as the main drivers of the burden of NCDs, including mental, neurological and substance use disorders, in SIDS;
- Identifying concrete actions to address the commercial determinants of health;
- Providing solutions to build health-enabling environments and food systems, and climate- and other crisis-resilient health systems that integrate NCD and mental health services;
- Acknowledging the importance of setting SIDS-specific national targets including for NCD financing;
- Calling for the institutionalisation of the meaningful involvement of people living with NCDs, including MNSDs, and young people in decision-making;
- Engaging civil society actors in the development process of the Bridgetown Declaration and annexes.

Read our full [NCD civil society response](#) [2] in support of the 2023 [Bridgetown Declaration](#) [1]. Below, see reactions from key players in the global NCD community who took part in the conference:

Sir Collin Tukuitonga, co-chair of the SIDS High-Level Policy Expert Group (centre)



“Despite our best efforts, our progress on NCD prevention and control is slow and patchy. Most SIDS will not achieve agreed NCD targets. Clearly, we need to do more, do better things, do things better and do so with urgency. The Bridgetown Declaration is an excellent opportunity to accelerate our actions on NCD prevention and control. Several possible actions are provided to be implemented appropriate to local circumstances. I encourage SIDS to take action.”

Prof. Alafia Samuels, Chair, NCD Child, Co-Chair, World Obesity Federation Policy and Prevention Committee

“This SIDS meeting is a great opportunity for south-south collaboration and sharing of context specific, evidenced-based innovations. We hope that WHO will support this sharing between countries. Management of NCDs must include monitoring quality of hospital care and guidelines for enhancing inpatient treatment. There is no NCD management without inpatient management. Neither WHO nor PAHO have included inpatient management of heart attack and stroke in their NCD action plans. This gap must be addressed if we are to meet our objectives of reducing NCD mortality and morbidity.”

Dr Kenneth Connell, Vice-President, Healthy Caribbean Coalition

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“There has been palpable and revolutionary philosophical change at this meeting; SIDS are talking ACTION. The two sentinel points for me were: 1. The CLEAR appreciation that financing health is an investment in the future — no GDP without UHC! 2. There is an urgent need to speak collectively as SIDS, to prevent the dumping of unhealthy foods in the region as import countries. We must demand the same food standards, including FOPWL, to address the unhealthy food awareness of consumers.”

Maria O'Brien - Mindwise Project – Mental health advocate

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“With 2030 approaching quickly, it is time to be fearless and bold with ACTION and TAKE THE LEAD on the inclusion of persons with lived experience, with a proper seat at the table. Let us amplify the extraordinary steps taken by the WHO with meaningful inclusion of lived experience in policymaking, and replicate these lessons back home. We invite all SIDS to join the [Voices of SIDS](#) [3] — Lived Experience Alliance, both by supporting and sharing the virtual community but also, by nominating a Lived Experience Country Champion to represent them, TOGETHER — For SIDS. #TogetherWeRise”

Alison Raw, Advisor and Head of Emergency Response, Commonwealth Secretariat (right) Dr Janneth

Mghamba, Health Advisor, Commonwealth Secretariat (left)



“The Commonwealth Secretariat was pleased to be invited to the SIDS ministerial conference on NCDs and mental health which was held in Barbados in June 2023. Our main takeaway from this meeting was a need for a multisectoral approach to address NCDs, with a strong focus on behavioural change and ensuring young people are at the centre of policy action. At the Commonwealth Secretariat, we will continue to utilise the strength of the Commonwealth on addressing NCDs at the intersection of health, sports, education, human rights and climate – ensuring that we bring different sectors together in common cause.

The Bridgetown Declaration is not just another declaration, but a catalyst for all of us to seize and take action on!”

Dr. The Honourable Christopher Tufton, Minister of Health and Wellness, Jamaica



“I applaud the organizers. The communique which has come out, which we hope to take to the UN High Level Meeting, is a good effort and will go a long way to highlight the issues. What I would like to see beyond this point is the driver of the agenda. It is important to have something written. This is where civil society comes in; an appointed set of representatives, an ambassador to drive the implementation. I would also like to see how we engage and measure the commitment of countries, and monitor the commitment of all stakeholders like the World Bank, the multilaterals who carry a lot of weight.”

Hon. St. Clair Prince, Minister of Health, St. Vincent and the Grenadines (middle)



“Civil society organisations now have to play a major role. We have to talk to CSOs as the people are going to trust CSOs more because they are among the people and represent the people. We have lapsed with respect to communication in recent times. We operate in silos; even in government we operate in silos as we have been too technical. It’s important for people living with NCDs to know what they need to do, thus coming out of the Declaration, a communication plan which drills down to the people encroached in behaviour science will be necessary.”

Dr. Arthur Phillips, Senior Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health and Wellness, Barbados



“The Declaration provides a platform for collaboration as the countries have agreed that these are the priorities and the things they want to take forward. Coming out of the Declaration, there are issues around financing. We need to have more international development funding for NCDs, which I believe will be a common point of advocacy from the SIDS community. I also believe there will be more south to south cooperation, with lessons being shared from our cousins and partners from the Pacific and vice-versa. We have agreed we have common interests and common issues and will be moving together to advance this agenda.”

Sarah Kline, CEO and Co-founder, United for Global Mental Health (speaking)

“It was encouraging to hear conference participants agree that addressing NCDs and mental health, together, is essential. The ministers agreed several key commitments including to increase domestic investment in mental health, decriminalise suicide and prohibit coercive practices in the treatment of mental health conditions. All commitments need to be fully realised: UnitedGMH will work with partners, including the NCD Alliance, to achieve this.”

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- [2] https://ncdalliance.org/resources/an-ncd-civil-society-response-in-support-of-the-2023-bridgetown-declaration?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=ncd-alliance-social-media&utm_content=ap_pli7immvkq
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