
The Africa NCDs Network advocates WHO AFRO Member States

Every year the WHO regional offices hold their Regional Committee Meetings (RCM) between the months of August and October to discuss and monitor progress on regional commitments. This year's 71st Session of the Regional Committee for Africa (AFRO RCM) took place on 24-26 August 2021, as a virtual meeting due to COVID-19 restrictions.

In preparation to the AFRO RCM, the Africa NCDs Network (ANN), supported by the NCD Alliance via its partnership with The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, hosted a virtual event on 12 August 2021 to discuss opportunities to position NCDs and Universal Health Coverage at the AFRO RCM. The event included civil society speakers from across the region and a representative from the Ministry of Health in Ghana.

The 130 participants focused on key NCDs and UHC-related agenda items: framework for implementing the Global Plan of Action of the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030; Framework for Strengthening the Use of Evidence, Information and Research for Policy-making in the African Region; and the Framework for Implementing the Global Strategy on Digital Health. Key highlights of the debate also helped the ANN develop a civil society statement on “Agenda Item 13: Implementation of the Global strategy to accelerate the elimination of Cervical Cancer as a public health problem in the WHO African Region”.

The NCD Alliance supported a virtual delegation from ANN to participate at the AFRO RCM, including Henry Ndhlovu from the Malawi NCD Alliance and George Msengi from the Tanzania NCD Alliance, both members of the ANN Secretariat.

The civil society statement co-signed by NCD Alliance, Africa NCDs Network and its 40-member CSO's, was submitted to WHO AFRO and read by Henry Ndhlovu during the meeting. The statement highlights the support of the signatories to Member States in the fight against cervical cancer and other NCDs, particularly through the implementation of the Global Strategy in the African region, which is expected to lead to a reduction in women dying from this condition.

Specifically, the statement called on all WHO AFRO Member States to:

- prioritise cervical cancer elimination through cost-effective, evidence-based interventions (including HPV vaccination);

- integration of screening into primary health care;
- prioritisation of training for primary health care professionals on screening and effective referral to other levels of care;
- intensification of awareness campaigns at schools and communities;
- meaningful involvement of people with lived experience in service provision and policies/programmes;
- promotion of innovative digital health/telemedicine;
- partnerships and collaborative work involving civil society, academic sector and relevant private sector.

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