

WHO Civil Society Working Group on NCDs
Statement on 9 September

Following last week's Global Week for Action on NCDs and during the final meeting of the WHO Independent High-Level Commission on NCDs, the WHO Civil Society Working Group on NCDs (CS WG) is pleased to have the opportunity to deliver this statement reiterating its commitment to help governments translate their promises into tangible progress for addressing NCDs and improving the health and wellbeing of all.

The CS WG, which was established in October 2017 by WHO Director-General Dr Tedros to advise him on bold and practical methods for mobilising civil society ahead of the third UN High-Level Meeting on NCDs in September 2018, was successful in mobilising a broad range of civil society and helped ensure high-level presence of Heads of State and Government at the third HLM on NCDs. The DG, recognising the success and importance of the WG, has therefore continued its scope of work through April 2021 with the primary objectives of mobilising NCD civil society to support the follow up and implementation of the 2018 HLM on NCDs; to maximise the opportunity presented by the first UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage; and to engage civil society from other health sectors to advocate for integration and to address co-morbidities as components of UHC.

The mandate for the second phase of the Civil Society Working Group aligns with the recommendations set forth in the WHO High-Level Commission on NCDs' *Time to Deliver* report and the Commission's focus for this second phase. We urge commissioners to ensure this second report reinforces the importance of civil society engagement and community leadership in implementation of the NCD and UHC response, a pre-requisite for governments to deliver person-centred programmes and policies for health promotion, disease prevention, and treatment and care that meet the needs of their people. Members of the Working Group and the networks they represent are well positioned to support governments as they seek to ensure healthy lives and wellbeing for all. We cannot understate the importance of ensuring people living with NCDs and those affected are at the centre of policy, plans and practice at both subnational and national levels.

One of the priorities of the WG's second phase is to advocate for the prioritisation of NCDs and co-morbidities within UHC. This final report of the Commission is timely, to be published shortly after the HLM when governments will be grappling with their own national UHC responses. We therefore urge commissioners to be bold, providing practical recommendations that support strong UHC responses with NCDs at the centre. The WG supports the concepts outlined in the draft Political Declaration on UHC, indicating all people of all ages will have equal access to nationally determined, age-appropriate health services. Essential services must integrate NCDs and mental health as an integral part of national UHC schemes in order for UHC to be effective. The numbers speak for themselves.

Without addressing NCDs at the primary health care level, health systems will struggle to meet the demands placed on them as the burden of NCDs rises. Ensuring health services and the development of policies are free from conflict of interest must be considered from the beginning of any UHC package design. Civil society has a role to play in UHC design, implementation, and monitoring, and are therefore essential in ensuring that national UHC packages include NCDs and cover the full continuum of care throughout the lifecourse, from health promotion and disease prevention through to treatment, rehabilitation, and palliation. The WG and its networks can provide technical expertise and input from those with lived experiences to ensure that health systems are comprehensive and address the needs of all people.

The WG encourages the Commissioners to continue their leadership for NCD prevention and control beyond the mandate of this High-Level Commission, for the world needs outspoken leaders and political will to truly deliver on commitments that will improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of millions of people worldwide.

As the Working Group moves into its next phase of work, we will be expanding membership to ensure broader representation of NCD civil society, with a focus on engaging young leaders and people living with NCDs. The leaders of today and tomorrow, and the people who are most affected by NCDs must have a seat at the table, and the WG is committed to ensuring these perspectives are included. The Working Group will play an important role in helping make the next decade a period of progress. We look forward to synergising our efforts and actions and supporting implementation of the 2018 Political Declaration on NCDs, the upcoming outcome of the HLM on UHC, and the recommendations of the High-Level Commission.