

Prioritising obesity in national Non Communicable Disease responses

A briefing for Heads of States, Ministers of Health and other government representatives attending the Third UN High-level meeting on Non Communicable Diseases

Addressing obesity is a vital piece of the Non Communicable Disease (NCD) puzzle which needs to be prioritised in national NCD responses. By 2025, 2.7 billion adults are expected to be overweight or living with obesity, and the global medical bill to treat the consequences is estimated to rise to \$1.2 trillion. Actions to prevent, manage and treat obesity throughout the life course are critical in helping governments to achieve the NCD targets that they committed to in 2011. This needs to start with the recognition that obesity is not only a risk factor for NCDs linked to poor nutrition and other causes, but a disease in its own right, which requires urgent attention.

There are a number of opportunities to integrate and address obesity within NCD responses and we encourage Heads of State, Health Ministers and other government representatives to stand up at the UN High-level meeting on NCDs (UNHLM) in support of the following actions priority actions related to obesity.

1. Include obesity within Universal Health Coverage

Obesity prevention, management and treatment should be integrated into Universal Health Coverage as an 'essential health service'. For people living with obesity, health services should provide access to appropriate and safe treatments, medicines and support services. Health care workers should be given adequate specialist training to support people with obesity and provisions need to be made to ensure they are sensitive to, and do not perpetuate, weight stigma, which can have negative impacts on both physical and mental health. Improving the treatment and care for people living with obesity can in turn improve health outcomes and reduce disability and premature mortality that results from obesity and its consequences.

2. Reaffirm commitment to reducing childhood obesity

WORLD OBESITY

It is estimated that 267 million school-aged children globally will be overweight or be living with obesity by 2025. The UNHLM should be seen as an opportunity for political leaders to renew their commitment to reducing childhood obesity. This will require the implementation of national obesity strategies which include a comprehensive package of policies, building on the work of the WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity (ECHO). Many countries have already shown leadership and implemented some strong policies, but more countries need to follow and more robust and comprehensive approaches are needed. Reducing childhood obesity is our best chance of preventing adult obesity and diabetes, and ending the obesity pandemic.

3. **Prioritise policies that tackle the social and commercial determinants of health**

Steps to tackle the social and commercial determinants of health will be essential for halting the rise in obesity. Political Leaders need to commit to implement the policies recommended by WHO, including the full set of WHO “Best Buy” policies where possible. Governments should prioritise policies which address the commercial determinants of health, including by implementing a sugar tax as part of comprehensive fiscal interventions (STAX). Tackling these commercial drivers will be essential for halting the rise in obesity and reducing NCDs.