

**World Obesity Federation statement in response to the High-Level Commission on Noncommunicable Diseases Report [embargoed until 1 June 2018]**

1 June 2018

The following statement is made in response to the recent publication of 'Time to Deliver, the Report[ref] of the WHO's Independent High-level Commission on Noncommunicable Diseases (the Commission) which was launched as part of the preparations for the third UN High-level Meeting on NCDs (UNHLM) taking place on 27<sup>th</sup> September.

As recognized in the report, the UNHLM is an important opportunity for country leaders at all levels, not just the Ministries of Health, to take bold action on NCDs, to include NCD reduction as part of their portfolio of priority issues and to place the health needs of its citizens at the centre of an integrated, whole-of-government approach. We congratulate the Commission for emphasizing the importance of High-level participation at the UNHLM.

We applaud the Commission's recognition of the global prevalence of obesity, acknowledging that the biggest increase in obesity comes from low and middle-income countries. By 2025, 2.7 billion adults worldwide are expected to be overweight or suffer from obesity and the global medical bill to treat the consequences is estimated to rise to \$1.2 trillion per year. We welcome the inclusion of the need to prioritise childhood obesity, as well as the acknowledgment of the multi-faceted challenges in tackling obesity: from the need to address inactivity to equitable access to healthy diets.

The seriousness of the obesity pandemic means bold steps are needed if we are to turn the tide on adult and child obesity. We would have liked to have seen the Commissioners go further and make bold recommendations on obesity, recognising it not just as a risk factor but for NCDs, but as a disease in its own right which is threatening to collapse already fragile health systems. As well as taking to steps to prevent obesity, Governments need to include obesity as part of their Universal Health Coverage packages, ensuring health services are sufficiently equipped to provide people suffering from obesity with access to appropriate and safe treatments, medicines and support services. Reducing obesity is an

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essential piece of the NCD action puzzle, and one which global leaders must take seriously if they are to achieve the NCD targets.

We welcome many of the specific recommendations made in the report, including to establish an international code of conduct to restrict the marketing of unhealthy food products. However, we are disappointed and concerned by the omission of a recommendation to tax sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB), to sit alongside the recommendation to tax tobacco and alcohol. This is inconsistent with other WHO Reports, including the NCD “[Best Buys](#)” and the WHO’s [Commission](#) on Ending Childhood Obesity which highlight SSB taxes as one part of an essential package of interventions that can be used to reduce obesity and NCDs. Comprehensive fiscal policies which tax sugar, tobacco and alcohol ([STAX](#)) are win-win interventions able to promote health and support the financing of further NCD activities, while also having a powerful effect on the accountability of the private sector. SSB taxes are capable of having an immediate effect, for instance in the UK, several companies preempted the tax by undertaking [reformulation](#) [while in [Mexico](#) the consumption levels of SSB have decreased by an annual average of 7.6% in the 2 years since the tax was introduced. This report focuses on the need for world leaders to take responsibility for NCDs, however, by failing to reach a consensus on sugar taxes the report effectively risks hampering their ability to do so. It cannot be right that the interests of the private sector are placed above those of their citizens.

The UNHLM in September provides the perfect opportunity for leaders to commit to turning the tide against NCDs and for prioritising action to reduce obesity. We encourage leaders to use the UNHLM to put the health of their citizens first and commit to a roadmap that incorporates the positive proposals of the report and looks to include proposals on SSB taxation, ensuring that policy commitments are implemented promptly and transparently. We look forward to working together to ensure that world leaders are equipped with the information they need to do exactly that.

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