

Latin American Declaration on the health emergency due to Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). March 2011

The civil society organizations working on the promotion of health and human rights, within the framework of the United Nations resolution that calls forth States to a summit of the General Assembly for the prevention and control of NCDs in September 2011, do hereby declare that:

The WHO has identified the following chronic diseases as the main threats to human health: cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases.¹

These four diseases are the main causes of death and disability worldwide, representing about 60% of deaths and 44% of early deaths (35 Million deaths every year, 80% of which occur in low and middle income countries).

NCDs represent a serious public health issue and are a health emergency worldwide. In spite of the severity of the situation, the funding to fight NCDs is only 1% of the total funding dedicated to development.

The main risk factors of NCDs are tobacco use, inadequate eating habits, physical inactivity and alcohol misuse, all of which are avoidable and preventable social determinants that also increase high blood pressure, dyslipidemia and obesity.

The impact of NCDs has increased due to the modifications of lifestyles, economic power of corporations that promote the use of harmful substances (tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food), social inequality and poverty, difficulty in access to health systems, and political and social inaction.

NCDs deepen social inequality since they have a greater impact on poor, less educated people, members of certain ethnic groups and women, all of whom have lower access to health services, thus hindering human development, counteracting the efforts in the fight against poverty and increasing health inequalities. Despite this, NCDs are still not part of the political agenda of most countries and the Millennium Development Goals.

Prevention and control of NCDs is a key action in ensuring sustainable human rights and human development. There are several international treaties² where States have assumed obligations and commitments to guarantee essential human rights that are directly connected to the prevention and control of NCDs. However, implementation of the treaties is insufficient.

In addition to the prevention and control of NCDs, treatment and access to effective and accessible health systems of people suffering from these diseases is essential to reduce morbid-mortality and to improve quality of life.

Policies required to reduce and control NCDs demand efforts and contributions from all sectors of society including governments, civil society, and the private sector, mass media, health professionals and the education sector, among other social stakeholders.

In accordance with the statements mentioned above, the undersigned organizations do hereby decide to create the Health Latin American Coalition (Coalición Latinoamérica Saludable - CLAS) for the prevention and control of NCDs.

¹ Although PAHO has established these four disease groups as priorities for reducing and controlling NCD, there are other contributing diseases such as severe mental illness, chronic osteopathy, chronic renal disease which also require an integrated health response.

² Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, International Agreement for Economic, Social and Cultural rights. Treaty for the prevention of discrimination against women, Interamerican Convention on Human Rights, International Treaty for Children's Rights.

Due to the magnitude and severity of the health, social and economic problems caused by NCDs in our countries, we urge Heads of State and Governments to participate in the September 2011 NCD Summit, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 64/265 adopted on 20 May 2010.

We request the Assembly of the United Nations gathered in New York on September 2011 to include the following recommendations in the resolution it may adopt.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To implement NCD promotion, prevention and control policies and actions in all governmental sectors and levels thus guaranteeing allocation of resources to that purpose, as an essential strategy to reduce poverty and promote development
2. To develop and implement a plan of action and execute appropriate surveillance mechanisms of NCDs, its consequences and risk factors and to evaluate policy impact.
3. To Foster the creation of intersectoral bodies for the prevention and control of NCDs.
4. To incorporate civil society organizations in formal participation stages before, during and after the summit in order to guarantee effective intersectoral cooperation.
5. To inform the community by means of large mass media campaigns about the prevention, early detection and treatment of NCDs

RECOMMENDATIONS ON POPULATION-BASED PUBLIC POLICIES FOR THE PREVENTION OF NCDs

6. To ratify and accelerate the implementation process of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control throughout the region, following the recommendations of the Conference of the Parties.
7. To promote healthy eating habits by means of legislation and policies that guarantee an adequate sodium, sugar and trans fat reduction in processed foods, that require labeling and packaging providing accurate content information and orientation, that restrict unhealthy foods and drinks advertising targeted to young, that guarantee healthy eating environments for children and that promote fruit, vegetable, and whole-grain cereal consumption and water consumption, among other measures.
8. To promote physical activity by means of community-based actions, evidence-based legislation and public policies that reduce barriers to physical activity.
9. To promote the reduction of harmful alcohol use by means of effective public policies reducing access and restricting advertising, promotion and sponsorship, among others.
10. To eliminate the interference of corporations that promote tobacco use, the consumption of alcohol and unhealthy foods by reducing access to such products and protecting the health of the population beyond the commercial interests of such corporations.

HEALTH CARE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

11. To guarantee the availability of accessible, affordable and effective services for the prevention, early detection and treatment of NCDs and their risk factors, with special emphasis on primary health care. Also, it is crucial to guarantee access and universal coverage to essential technology and medication which are cost-effective for the treatment of NCDs to all the population with special focus on the vulnerable groups.
12. To guarantee education and training to health professionals regarding the comprehensive treatment of NCDs with special focus on health promotion and disease prevention.
13. To strengthen urgency and emergency networking to provide care of acute events that are a consequence of NCDs and are frequently causes of death or disability.