

THE INTERAMERICAN TASK FORCE ON NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASES



JOINT STATEMENT ON NONCOMMUNICABLE DISEASES AND COVID-19

"As together we reconstruct and transform our economy, our social protection and health systems post COVID-19, we need to pay critical attention to the prevention, early diagnosis and management of Noncommunicable Diseases". Dr Carissa Etienne, Director of the Pan American Health Organization, May 26, 2020.

Whereas:

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted all aspects of our societies: the way we live, work, study, and socialize. Its effect is being felt in health systems and economies in all countries of the Region of the Americas.

Uneven access to social protection, health services, essential medicines, healthy food, safe drinking water, proper sanitation, education, and technologies—combined with unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, mental disorders, and stigma—present many challenges to sustainable development, universal health coverage, and recovery from the pandemic.

Underlying noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and associated risk factors (tobacco smoking, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets, and physical inactivity) have emerged as closely linked to severe cases of COVID-19, affecting vulnerable groups across all age groups, and are closely linked to the principal social determinants of health.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the links between physical and mental health, infectious and noncommunicable diseases, and health and sustainable development. The pandemic has highlighted the responsibility of all elements of society to work together in a united and coherent manner, in the prevention and control of NCDs and mental health, so that health systems and individuals can be better prepared in future outbreaks.

Cost-effective solutions exist for the prevention and control of NCDs. However, slow action by countries in the Region to implement these interventions is now contributing to the COVID-19 pandemic, and may lead to long-term consequences if existing policies are further weakened.

Effective action on NCDs requires a multisectoral approach across all government sectors—as well as civil society—not only for policy implementation and enforcement, but also for generating the necessary political will to support risk factor reduction measures. Such measures usually face strong opposition from industries involved in the manufacture, marketing, distribution, and sale of harmful products such as tobacco, alcohol, sugar-sweetened beverages, and ultraprocessed foods.

The members of the InterAmerican Task Force (IATF) on NCDs pledge to renew and strengthen their efforts to promote intersectoral and interagency dialogue and cooperation towards fiscal, economic, and health policy coherence in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and in the post-pandemic recovery phase.

The IATF will work jointly, and in a complementary manner, in the prevention and control of NCDs and their risk factors to promote policies and interventions that support health-in-all-policies across the lifespan—with equity—while reinforcing the role of health as an essential component of human capital.

Therefore, the IATF on NCDs will work together to implement measures that:

- a) Highlight the adverse impact of NCDs and their risk factors on the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, considering the added challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and promote policies and interventions to achieve these global goals.
- b) Promote multisectoral engagement within the scope of work of the IATF member Agencies and Organizations to respond to COVID-19, and in the post-pandemic period, to strengthen NCD risk factor policies and improve the health system response for NCDs.
- c) Foster policy and regulatory interventions in support of health protection, reduction of NCD risk factors, and health care services that are equitable, accessible, and affordable.
- d) Advocate for sustainable, health-promoting food systems in the post COVID-19 regional and national responses.
- e) Encourage the use of taxes to reduce health risks, build better health systems, and help finance COVID-19 recovery efforts.