



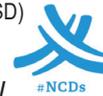
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NCDs Bulletin

A Briefing Note of the High-Level Round Table of Countries “Friends of the Task Force”

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**UN INTERAGENCY
TASK FORCE ON NCDs**



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BRIEFING NOTE OF THE HIGH-LEVEL ROUND TABLE OF COUNTRIES “FRIENDS OF THE TASK FORCE”: 22 SEPTEMBER 2016

The high-level round table of countries “Friends of the Task Force” took place on 22 September 2016 at the UN Headquarters in New York, during the 71th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), one year after the 193 UN Member States adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The World Health Organization (WHO) and the Russian Federation hosted this high-level event to look at the progress made in the UN’s work on non-communicable diseases (NCDs). NCDs, along with mental health, injuries from road traffic accidents and environmental pollution, have become central to the SDGs. The meeting focused on the current work of the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on the Prevention and Control on NCDs, showcasing how UN organizations are working together to support countries scale-up multi-sectoral action, in order to enable progress towards global and national NCDs targets.

The Task Force was established by the UN Secretary-General in 2013 to coordinate the activities of UN funds, programmes and specialized agencies and other intergovernmental organizations to support the realization of the commitments made by heads of state and government in the NCD 2011 Political Declaration, in particular through the implementation of the WHO Global NCD Action Plan 2013-2020. The Task Force unites more than thirty agencies, including the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). In June 2016, the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted a resolution encouraging the Task Force to support governments to implement the new NCD-related targets in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The meeting was attended by the President of Sri Lanka, where, in 2015, 11 different UN agencies joined forces on a Task Force mission. High-level officials from the countries present at the roundtable highlighted the range of NCDs-related targets in the SDGs, such as: by 2030, reduce by 1/3 premature mortality from NCDs through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being (target 3.4); strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol (target 3.5); By 2020, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents (target 3.6); and strengthen the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate (target 3.a). They also noted the strong linkages between NCDs and poverty, education, economic growth and multiple other SDGs, framing NCDs as an issue that cuts across all sectors.. They further stressed that, if NCDs are effectively addressed: economies will be stronger; the labor force more productive; and children will be able to attend school rather than looking after their parents with illnesses caused by tobacco and alcohol.

REPORT OF THE MEETING

Opening the meeting, Margaret Chan, Director-General, WHO, stressed that the costs of managing heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases have become unaffordable even for the wealthiest countries in the world. Explaining that prevention means addressing root causes, like tobacco use, the harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets, and lack of physical activity, she noted that the response to the NCD risk factors lies outside the purview of the health sector and thus collaboration across a broad range of sectors is essential. She stressed that one of the most important platforms for catalyzing action is the Task Force, which, with its inter-sectoral work and “unparalleled” logistical and operational capacities “deserves its many friends.”

Noting that Barbados faces a heavy burden of NCDs that cause premature mortality, significant disability and are “a severe drag” on the economy of Barbados, John Boyce, Minister of Health, Barbados, spoke about the Task Force’s first joint mission to his country in April 2015, when six UN agencies joined. He said the UN system supported Barbados in finalizing the 2015-2019 Strategic Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs, which sets out a number of time-bound objectives based on the 2007 Port of Spain Declaration and the 2013-2020 WHO Global NCD Action Plan. Following the Task Force’s mission, he said that a National Childhood Obesity Strategy was approved by the government; a national UN Task Force has been established to strengthen in-country coordination on NCDs; and the government of Barbados has imposed a 10% tax increase on carbonated high-calorie drinks. Boyce concluded that “the evidence is that the Task Force is a mechanism that works” and needs to be supported by all governments.

Veronika Skvortsova, Minister of Healthcare, Russian Federation, highlighted the Russian Federation’s support for the Task Force. Skvortsova noted that the borderline between communicable and noncommunicable diseases becomes increasingly unclear, as many communicable diseases are developing against the background of NCDs. She stressed the need for multisectoral interventions promoting tobacco-free and alcohol-free lifestyles. Skvortsova noted that Russia is one of the world leaders in increasing its citizens’ lifespans and plans to reduce cardiovascular deaths by 1/3 over the next 10 years. She presented a few national initiatives that address NCDs, including the launch of a high-quality program for screening and early detection and the creation of a network of more than 540 well-equipped cardiovascular centers. Skvortsova underlined that Russia will continue to make NCDs a priority both nationally and internationally.

After the opening interventions, moderator Nick Banatvala, Senior Adviser, Office of Assistant Director-General for NCDs and Mental Health, WHO, announced the launch of the

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publication ‘What Government Ministries Need to Know about Noncommunicable Diseases,’ a set of briefs produced by the Task Force to provide policy and decision makers across government with information about how NCDs affect their sector, as well as about the steps they can take to respond to the challenges of NCDs while advancing their own objectives. The briefs identify strategies for tackling NCDs that can deliver benefits to finance, education, labour and employment, trade and industry, and other sectors needed in the NCD response.

In the ensuing panel discussion, Jimmy Kolker, Assistant Secretary for Global Affairs, US Department of Health and Human Services, noted that the US is increasing its focus on NCDs both in its domestic and international policy, especially with regards to prevention and early detection. He presented several multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder initiatives that address NCDs nationally, highlighting the potential of mobile technology in increasing the effectiveness of efforts. He used cervical cancer as an example of an area of particular interest, welcoming the Task Force’s new global programme in this area.

Annette Widmann-Mauz, Parliamentary Secretary of State, Federal Ministry of Health, Germany, noted that addressing NCDs is one of Germany’s domestic priorities, with a particular focus on prevention, early detection, and social protection. She stressed that the Task Force plays a key role in addressing NCDs globally and announced that Germany will remain a reliable partner in the following years.

Naoko Yamamoto, Assistant Minister for Global Health and Health Industry Strategy, Ministry of Health, Japan, stressed the need to make “maximum efforts” towards universal health coverage. She observed that a multi-sectoral, community-based approach is essential for addressing NCDs, as well as creating a well-functioning health care workforce. Noting that NCDs are strongly related to the environment, water and sanitation aspects and cultural factors, she highlighted that the Task Force is very important because it enables a whole-of-government, whole-of-UN, and whole-of-society approach. She underscored that Japan will continue contributing to the Task Force and collaborate with the Task Force’s Friends and partners.

Raniero Guerra, Director General, Ministry of Health, Italy, reported that Italy is facing a marginal decrease in the life expectancy of its people, as well as a decrease in the quality of life, which shows that achievements in health care and well being are vulnerable. He noted that: 70%-80% of Italy’s medical expenditures are related to NCDs; 8 in 11 cases registered in Italy’s emergency rooms are NCDs; and the demographic change towards aging affects the sustainability of the Italian society. He stressed the need to make the science-based economic case for addressing NCDs. Guerra further expressed his government’s readiness to join the Friends of the Task Force and to make Italy’s scientific expertise available, as well as to bring NCDs to the G7’s attention during Italy’s presidency in 2017.

Matshidiso Rebecca Moeti, Regional Director for Africa, WHO, stressed African countries’ great need for support in tackling NCDs and expressed the value of the work of the Task Force. She spoke about the Task Force’s potential to serve as a tool of integration for the work of the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) at the country level. Esther Lungu, First Lady, Zambia, welcomed plans for the Task Force to visit Zambia in December 2016. She highlighted that the great sacrifices and investments made

to address communicable diseases such as HIV, tuberculosis and malaria “will go down the drain” if the “looming crisis” of NCDs is not also addressed. She noted that, while Zambia will prioritize NCDs in its national development plan 2017-2021 and will undertake active efforts to raise awareness and enable better results, international support is crucial for success.

Douglas Webb, Team Leader: Health and Innovative Financing, UNDP, further highlighted the need for international support to enable the Task Force to catalyze multisectoral action and domestic financing for national NCDs responses. He reminded the meeting that the Task Force is ready and waiting to scale up its response and there is significant demand for ever greater action but that funds as required if the Task Force is to provide the technical support that middle- and low-income countries are asking for. Webb described the components of WHO and UNDP’s Global Joint Programme to Activate National Responses to NCDs, which includes how the Task Force is supporting governments to better understand the economics behind investing in the prevention of NCDs and the substantial return on investment (ROI) from cost-effective interventions. Katie Dain, Executive Director, The NCD Alliance, underscored that addressing NCDs should be seen as an investment rather than an expenditure. She spoke about how The NCD Alliance’s growing network of national and regional alliances provides platforms that could be effectively utilized by governments to facilitate a multi-sectoral, whole-of-society approach to NCDs, as well as to find new partners.

Oleg Chestnov, Assistant Director-General on NCDs and Mental Health, WHO, highlighted the progress made since the establishment of the Task Force, including: fielding of joint programming missions to 15 countries (Belarus, Kenya, India, Tonga, Barbados, Jordan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mongolia, Sri Lanka, Mozambique, Paraguay, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Turkey and Viet Nam); development and roll-out of a set of global joint programmes that strengthen national governance for multi-sectoral action against NCDs, mobile technology of tackling NCDs, cancer control, and cervical cancer; greater inclusion of NCDs on the action agendas of many UN agencies, the World Bank and other international organizations at the global, regional and country levels; and

catalyzing greater investment in addressing NCDs by making the economic case for investment in NCDs for the particular circumstances of each country.

Chestnov stressed that the Task Force has shown that it can deliver but it now needs to be sustainably resourced in order to deliver on the increasing demands of Member States, particularly low and middle income countries. He explained that resources are required to provide technical assistance for supporting countries to scale up multisectoral action at national level and to invest more in their domestic NCD responses. Chestnov further noted that the roundtable is an important milestone for the Task Force, which now has a group of partners that are willing to work with it in order to ensure that it has the capacity to provide the technical expertise needed for countries to meet the NCDs-related SDG targets. Chestnov committed to follow up with partners on their commitments at the meeting in order to generate greater financing for the work of the Task Force. Chestnov concluded by expressing his certainty that more governments will follow the leadership provided by the countries present at the roundtable.