

WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the panel discussion "From words to action for better noncommunicable disease outcomes", World Health Summit - 16 October 2022

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Minister Al Kuwari; Minister Mandaviya; Excellencies, dear colleagues and friends.

I thank UNITAR and the Defeat NCD Partnership for co-hosting this event with WHO.

You are all familiar with the statistics: every year, NCDs kill 17 million people under the age of 70 – one every two seconds.

What is less known is the fact that NCDs account for 85% of premature deaths in low- and middle-income countries.

The health consequences are bad enough; the financial consequences can be devastating.

Every year, millions of people who live in poverty are exposed to severe financial hardship as a result of out-of-pocket costs to manage NCDs.

Families are faced with decisions that no family should ever be, like whether to buy food or medicine.

Many choose to forego treatment because they simply cannot afford it.

And yet we know we can prevent NCDs, the suffering they cause and the costs they incur, by reducing exposure to risk factors, and by improving access to services for prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

The Sustainable Development Goals set a target of reducing premature deaths from NCDs by one third by 2030.

But on current trends, we will not reach that target.

That is why we've called this the session "From Words to Action".

It is time to step up.

At the UN General Assembly last month, WHO co-hosted the first meeting of the Heads of State Group to discuss the Global NCD Compact.

WHO is committed to supporting countries to address NCDs with evidence-based policies, backed by timely and reliable data.

However, far too many people around the world lack access to these life-saving medicines and interventions, especially in the lowest-income countries.

Today, we are discussing several efforts to address these severe inequities.

One important contribution is the Defeat NCDs Partnership's Essential Supplies and Distribution Facility, which aims to improve the availability and affordability of medicines, diagnostics, and devices.

The partnership has also supported countries including Rwanda and Gambia to develop, fund and implement national costed action plans, and together with WHO, to support young researchers.

Like any other area of health, research is essential if we are to make progress.

That's why I have established a WHO Technical Advisory Group on NCDs Innovation and Research, which will focus on implementation research, and on building capacity in research.

Investing in the next generation of public health leaders and researchers in lower-income countries will help close the knowledge-to-action gap and improve the uptake of proven NCD interventions.

That is why WHO, the Defeat NCDs Partnership and the Alliance for Health Policy and Systems Research have launched an NCD implementation research grant programme for young researchers from low- and lower-middle income countries.

Today we are pleased to present eight finalists whose research efforts will make a difference. Please join me in congratulating these young leaders.

I thank you.

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