

Statement to the European Commission; Heads of States and Governments from EU countries

This statement is delivered by the European Chronic Disease Alliance (ECDA) and supported by the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) in the context of the 27th September United Nations (UN) High-Level Meeting on non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in New York, where countries and civil society organisations gathered to review progress and track trends to prevent, control and treat NCDs.

The ECDA and EPHA applaud the engagement of the six Heads of States/Governments from EU Member States who participated in the meeting. The participation of EU Commissioner for Health, Mr Andriukaitis, showed political intention and support for a strong response to chronic diseases in the EU. Nevertheless, we deeply regret that less than half of EU Member States were represented at the meeting.

The High-level meeting has renewed focus on acting on chronic diseases internationally and further engaged countries to reach the goals they have committed to. It marks a further step in global efforts. Yet, and despite some positive elements, the political declaration lacks ambition – and inexplicably fails to make reference to the WHO Best Buys and other recommended interventions which provide evidence on cost-effective actions to tackle the diseases. We deplore the absence of any reference to taxes and other fiscal measures, which are evidence-based, effective means to address behavioural risk factors as well as the commercial and market determinants of health – which are recognised in the declaration. The declaration does not contain time-bound commitments from countries to deliver measurable advances, including national NCD plans, and to monitor results.

Following the High-Level Meeting, the ECDA and EPHA call on all EU Member States to capitalise on the discussions and exchanges that took place. While congratulating themselves on successfully addressing mortality from NCDs – mortality from NCDs is declining in most EU countries – they should not lose sight of the increasing prevalence which threatens to bankrupt healthcare systems and seriously affects the economy not to mention the personal and social burden. The ECDA and EPHA urge the EU Member States to enhance collaborative efforts with the European Commission, and engage in a constructive dialogue to identify good practices for replication at national level via the EU Steering Group on Promotion and Prevention of chronic diseases. Upcoming EU Council Presidencies could also contribute to accelerating progress by putting on their Presidency agenda at least one recommended intervention – Best Buy – to work on at EU level.

Further, ECDA and EPHA strongly encourage the European Commission to propose the expected legislative measure on trans fats, following its success in Denmark and other EU countries, as well as a regulation on alcohol labelling; and to work further with EU countries to transfer and expand across Europe widely accepted good practices to respond to the determinants of the diseases - tailored to country needs and circumstances. This will support Member States in attaining SDG target 3.4, which requires policies and interventions that reduce tobacco and alcohol use and blood pressure in particular, as well as equitable access to preventive and curative care¹.

We call on the future Commission leaders to recognise the burden of chronic diseases on our European societies and economies, and invest in this challenge which impacts sustainable economic growth, healthcare systems and labour markets in Europe. By making action on health and chronic diseases an essential part of its political agenda, the Commission will further show to European citizens the added value of Europe when it comes to health and social affairs, one of their number one priorities. This could, in addition, help combat the rise of populist-nationalism in Europe.

Our organisations stand ready to work with Member States and the EU institutions to implement strong interventions to reduce the prevalence and mortality from chronic diseases in Europe.

¹ NCD Countdown 2030: worldwide trends in non-communicable disease mortality and progress towards Sustainable Development Goal target 3.4. The Lancet. September 2018. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31992-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)31992-5)