

## **ICAN Statement on UN High-Level Meeting on Non-Communicable Diseases**

September 24, 2018

The International Coalition for Advocacy on Nutrition (ICAN), comprised of organizations and advocates working to end malnutrition in all its forms by improving policies and scaling up investments for nutrition, urges Heads of State and Government to provide political leadership for the non-communicable disease (NCD) response at this year's UN High-Level Meeting (UNHLM) on NCDs. The coalition calls on world leaders to attend the UNHLM and prioritize policies and investments that address the critical role that quality nutrition and food systems play in preventing and reducing childhood obesity and NCDs.

Malnutrition is a global problem with global consequences. [815 million people around the world suffer from chronic hunger](#), [151 million children are stunted while 51 million children are wasted](#). Malnutrition remains a leading cause of child deaths, accounting for [nearly half of all deaths in children under 5](#). In 2017, an estimated [38 million children](#) under age five were overweight – a number that is expected to double over the next decade. More than [two-thirds of overweight children reside in low and middle-income countries](#), and many of these countries are dealing with rising levels of obesity alongside undernutrition, including the crises of childhood stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies.

Poor quality food systems contribute to unhealthy diets and a rise in overweight, obesity and diet-related NCDs like heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and ultimately, premature death. [An established - and growing - body of evidence shows](#) that the 1000-day window between a woman's pregnancy and her child's second birthday is a particularly critical period in which external and environmental factors, like nutrition, determine lifelong health. The right nutrition in this window is critical in reducing malnutrition and the risk of chronic, non-communicable diseases later in life.

Proven, cost-effective interventions that address undernutrition can also help reduce and prevent overweight, obesity and NCDs. Double duty actions like, exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months of life, help protect a child against obesity and NCDs later in life. Moreover, breastfeeding lowers a woman's risk of cardiovascular disease, breast and ovarian cancer, diabetes, stroke, and depression. Affordable access to nutritious and age-appropriate foods for children over six months of age, as a complement to continued breastfeeding, contributes to a child's healthy diet. A well-balanced, diverse diet can ensure that children are getting all the vitamins and minerals they need to grow healthy and strong.

Despite the evidence, the world is drastically underinvesting in proven interventions to fight malnutrition. Analysis by the [World Bank estimates that investing an additional \\$7 billion](#) each year over 10 years in nutrition-specific interventions could save 3.7 million children's lives and result in 65 million fewer stunted and 105 million more children exclusively breastfed. These investments are critical to setting children on the path of lifelong health and more funding is still needed to address the underlying determinants of malnutrition and NCDs.

Progress toward achieving the global nutrition targets and Sustainable Development Goal 2.2 - to end all forms of malnutrition - is at risk of being undermined by the rising tide of childhood overweight and obesity. World leaders seeking to prevent malnutrition, reduce NCDs, save lives and spur economic growth should prioritize investments and policies that improve access, availability and affordability of healthy food and nutrition for all.