



**Joint statement to the Special Session of the WHO Executive Board,  
5-6 October 2020  
Provisional agenda item 3: Update on implementation of  
resolution WHA73.1 (2020) on the COVID 19 response**

WCRF International and World Obesity Federation, supported by NCD Alliance commend WHO & Member States for their leadership on COVID-19.

However we remain concerned that obesity and non-communicable diseases including cancer - leading risk factors for COVID-19 and complications - are not prioritised in Member State pandemic response to the level and urgency required. Individuals with obesity are 46% more likely to test positive for COVID-19, and a 48% increase in mortality rate was reported. On current trends, 1 in 5 adults worldwide are expected to be affected by obesity by 2025. Rising obesity rates have grave consequences for diet-related NCDs such as cancer and health outcomes from COVID-19 and other infectious disease threats.

Lack of access to healthy diets and physical activity risk exacerbating these conditions, disproportionately affecting vulnerable and low-income households and affecting the long term health and resilience of populations. There are also many instances of food & beverage industries utilising the crisis to promote unhealthy commodities which compromise health.

The threat of pandemics to populations and economies will not end soon and it is critical that Member States ensure that all have access to healthy, available and affordable food and physical activity to strengthen health today and prepare for tomorrow. We urge Member States to:

- urgently implement and invest in comprehensive policies and actions such as the Best Buys to improve food environments, for instance through marketing restrictions and taxes. These should be legally-binding and mandatory and accompanied by accountability mechanisms.
- ensure policies, partnerships, and dialogues relating to nutrition are conducted with principles of engagement to protect from inappropriate and vested interests undermining health.