

World Cancer Research Fund International position statement on Universal Health Coverage

World Cancer Research Fund International strongly supports the overall goal of the 2019 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) political declaration on universal health coverage (UHC)¹ to ensure accessible, affordable and equitable essential health services for everyone in the world by 2030.

We believe that UHC must include prevention and health promotion measures in order to better prevent and manage NCDs, including cancer.

We recognise that UHC is a key instrument for achieving the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in particular the health-related goals including:

- 3.4 - Reducing premature deaths from NCDs through prevention and treatment
- 3.8 - UHC access to essential health-care services essential medicines and vaccines with financial risk protection

In addition, UHC can contribute to achieving improved pandemic prevention, preparedness and response (PPPR) by enabling healthier and more resilient populations.

NCDs (non-communicable diseases) currently account for 41 million deaths per year, or 74% of deaths globally², and more than three-quarters of all NCD deaths occur in low and middle income countries³.

Action to prevent NCDs, including cancer, is important to reduce the health and economic burden both on individuals and health and social care systems. This is crucial for low and middle income countries, which must contend with the double burden of combatting and funding treatment for infectious diseases and NCDs.

The economic impact of having to pay out-of-pocket for much needed NCD care can result in medical poverty, or individuals not being able to access or receive the care they need. This can compound poor health and reduce people's ability to work, further impoverishing them. In recognition of these financial and health impacts, people living with NCDs should be considered as a vulnerable population group.

At the forthcoming UN High Level Meeting on UHC,⁴ we urge that the Political Declaration arising recognises:

- The global burden of NCDs (including cancer) and the need to invest proportionately in services to prevent and manage NCDs, including in primary care⁵

- The importance of access to the continuum of care with regards to cancer, from prevention and screening through treatment, post diagnosis care and support, and palliative care, enabling more effective prevention, diagnosis and treatment
- The need to tackle malnutrition in all its forms, including undernutrition and overnutrition, the latter leading to overweight and obesity; a leading risk factor for NCD development
- The need to ensure food systems can support healthy populations, including through policies to make nutritious and healthy food accessible, affordable, sustainable, and safe, while also addressing the impacts of social and commercial determinants of health

National UHC benefit packages should include the following (not exhaustive):

- Cancer/NCD prevention services including measures enabling and supporting:
 - Healthy diets
 - Physical activity promotion
 - Tobacco control
 - Alcohol control
 - HPV vaccination
- Cancer care and support services covering not only treatment but also:
 - Nutritional support for people diagnosed with cancer including before and during cancer treatment
 - Post diagnosis nutrition and physical activity advice and support
- Nutrition services including:
 - Nutrition interventions in primary care
 - Training of community health workers to deliver key nutrition services
 - Essential medicines and products to treat under-nutrition
 - Prevention and management of obesity

To ensure true accessibility, affordability and equity, UHC benefits packages should reach and support vulnerable populations including refugees, migrants and people living with disabilities.

¹ <https://www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/07/FINAL-draft-UHC-Political-Declaration.pdf>

² <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/noncommunicable-diseases>

³ https://www.who.int/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases#tab=tab_1

⁴ <https://www.who.int/activities/preparing-for-the-un-high-level-meeting-2023-and-achieving-health-for-all>

⁵ Currently most LMIC invest less than 1% of their healthcare budget in NCDs, which doesn't reflect NCD incidence or burden.