



# MISSION BRIEFING: ACCELERATING CANCER PREVENTION EFFORTS



77<sup>TH</sup> WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY  
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We want cancer prevention to be a core priority for all governments. The global cancer burden is growing: there are an estimated **20 million new cancer cases per year<sup>1</sup>**, and it is predicted to rise to **35 million by 2050 (77% increase)**. Approximately 1 in 5 people are developing cancer in their lifetime, with vulnerable populations being disproportionately impacted. There is an urgent need to address cancer risk factors, including health inequities.

Approximately **40% of cancers are preventable<sup>2</sup>**. To address the links between diet, weight, physical activity, alcohol intake, breastfeeding, and cancer risk, we recommend that Member States implement evidence-based policies, like WHO's 'Best Buys'<sup>3</sup>. These policies aim to improve access to **healthy diets, increase rates of physical activity, and reduce alcohol consumption**.

At this year's World Health Assembly, there are six agenda items that can support cancer prevention efforts. We therefore call on Member States to take action in the following areas:

## 11.1 Universal Health Coverage

Despite political commitments made in 2019 and 2023, we are far behind in achieving universal health coverage (UHC) for 1 billion people by 2030. We urge Member States to prioritize issues that are critical to achieving UHC goals, including:

- Setting specific targets for investment in health, aligning with calls for targets of at least 5% GDP on health spending<sup>4</sup>.
- Supporting increased investment in prevention and control of cancer through sufficient and sustainable resources for UHC.

- Committing to the implementation of the 2023 UHC Political Declaration, and advancing momentum for increasing progress ahead of the 2027 UN High-level Meeting on UHC.
- Including prevention, screening and care services for cancer and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in country UHC health benefit packages.
- Integrating prevention and care for cancer and other NCDs alongside other global health priorities, and accelerate progress ahead of the 2025 UN High-level meeting on NCDs.

## We express concern:

At the lack of alignment between health spending and national disease burdens within the context of UHC benefits packages

- The estimated annual economic cost of cancer is in excess of US\$1.2 trillion, making it more expensive than all other 15 leading causes of death worldwide<sup>5</sup>.
- Progressively investing in a core package of cancer services could save 7.3 million lives by 2030 by implementing a basic package of services with an annual per capita investment of US\$2.70 in low-income countries, US\$3.95 in lower-middle-income countries and US\$8.15 in upper-middle-income countries<sup>6,7</sup>.
- Cancer prevention and control policies offer value for money, and are prominently featured in the updated list of NCD 'best buys'<sup>3</sup>.



## 11.2 Follow-up to the political declaration of the third high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

Ahead of next year's Fourth High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the prevention and control of NCDs, we strongly encourage Member States to prioritize intervention on the growing global burden of NCDs by:

- Engaging with the High-level meeting preparatory processes and commit to accelerating progress towards achieving SDG target 3.4 (reducing NCD premature mortality by one third by 2030).
- Strengthening political and financial commitments towards improving cancer and other NCD prevalence, including through the Global NCD Financing Dialogue this June.
- Engaging in the Global NCD Monitoring Framework update and commit to the strengthening of global NCD targets; this includes developing a set of indicators, improved accountability and governance mechanisms, and inclusion of civil society in these processes.
- Developing and/or updating adequately funded national cancer strategy plans, that include cancer prevention strategies (such as interventions to promote healthy diets, reduce rates of overweight and obesity, and increasing access to physical activity), as well as targets and provisions across the cancer care spectrum.
- Supporting continued optimization of the implementation road map 2023-2030 for the Global action plan for the prevention and control of NCDs, including the expanded list of WHO 'Best Buy'<sup>3</sup> policies (approved at the 76th World Health Assembly), as well as its other recommended actions to accelerate progress towards the 2030 targets.
- Engaging with, supporting and disseminating the WHO's 2025 Global Status Report on Cancer findings.
- Strengthening and improving cancer (and other NCD) risk factor surveillance with disaggregated collection to improve sharing of information, identifying vulnerable populations, and efficacy of policy responses.

### We express concern:

At the insufficient consideration of how determinants of health (social, commercial, political, etc.) impact and effect NCD prevention and care.

- Socioeconomic factors greatly increase risk of cancer development (including exposure to alcohol, and obesity).
- Cancer incidence and mortality rates are both disproportionately high within lower-income and vulnerable populations, and bear the brunt of the global cancer burden.
- NCD policymaking processes must be safeguarded from the undue influence of health-harming industries, including unhealthy foods, breastmilk substitutes, alcohol, tobacco, and fossil fuels.

## 15.1 Social determinants of health

We strongly support and welcome the latest update on the WHO World Report on the Social Determinants of Health Equity (SDoHE). We urge Member States to take action to improve health equity globally by:

- Supporting, implementing and engaging with the 14 recommendations made to Member States in the WHO World Report on SDoHE to improve health equity and reshape our health systems globally.
- Addressing the impacts of commercial determinants of health, including regulation of unhealthy commodity industries that disproportionately negatively impact vulnerable populations.
- Engaging with sectors beyond health to promote and protect health equitably.
- Increasing collection of disaggregated data and/or development of a national monitoring mechanism on social determinants of health equity, to improve measurement of determinants, and monitor impacts of equitable interventions on health outcomes.
- Working towards achieving UHC goals to enable equitable access to quality health care, including across the cancer and NCD care spectrum, and minimize out-of-pocket expenditure.

### We express concern:

At the inequity that persists within and between countries, and the insufficient uptake of the 2008 recommendations of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health.

- Member States must take forward the findings and recommendations, which would support improvements across the cancer-care continuum—from prevention to living with-and-beyond cancer.



## 15.2 Maternal, infant and young child nutrition

Given the importance of maternal and infant nutrition on health outcomes of both mother and child, we strongly encourage Member States to accelerate action towards achieving the nutrition targets on childhood overweight and breastfeeding, by:

- Protecting, promoting and supporting breastfeeding within national legislation, in line with the International Code of Marketing Breast-milk Substitutes and WHO's Guidance on regulatory measures aimed at restricting digital marketing of breast-milk substitutes.
- Implementing policies to shift consumption patterns towards healthier diets; implementing best-practice policies, such as the NCD 'Best Buys'<sup>3</sup>, would reduce global cancer and NCD burdens.
- Supporting an extension of the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition, or follow-up mechanism.
- Engaging with the new WHO Acceleration Plan to STOP Obesity, including its policy recommendations and membership as an Obesity Coalition front-runner country, and make a National Commitment with the School Meals Coalition.

### We express concern:

At the lack of attention and focus on improving nutrition and healthy diets at UN Food Systems Summit Mechanisms.

- We recommend improved engagement and emphasis on improving nutrition and dietary patterns in preparation for the next UN Food Systems Summit and Nutrition for Growth Summit (27-28 March 2025).



## 15.3 Well-being and health promotion

We welcome the positive outcomes developing from the *Achieving well-being: global framework for integrating well-being into public health* utilizing a health promotion approach's implementation and monitoring plan. We recommend Member States further advance health-promotion and well-being, by:

- Adopting the decision on strengthening health and well-being through sport events, and recognize it as a significant opportunity for health promotion.
- Restricting unhealthy products marketing and sponsorship in sports and events settings, particularly unhealthy foods, alcohol and other unhealthy commodities.
- Using sporting events as an opportunity to promote health and well-being, by promoting physical activity, behaviour change, and combine with other NCD 'Best Buy'<sup>3</sup> policies to promote healthier diet patterns and reduced alcohol consumption.

### We express concern:

At the continued use of the term 'harmful use of alcohol', as any level of alcohol consumption increases the risk of cancer as well as other NCDs.

- We instead recommend 'alcohol use' to avoid the misconception that there is any safe level of alcohol consumption.

## 17 Draft fourteenth general programme of work, 2025-2028

As Member States consider the draft fourteenth General Programme of Work (GPW14) during this assembly, we recommend:

- Maintaining GPW14's text and commitments to risk factors and the wider determinants of health, and specifically addressing NCDs.
- Including text to specifically reference and promote WHO 'Best Buy'<sup>3</sup> policies in helping to address NCDs, their risk factors and wider determinants of health.
- Supporting and committing to increasing health spending and setting specific targets for investment in health, such as 5% of GDP<sup>4</sup>.
- Supporting the draft's inclusion of the climate crisis, inequitable burden of out-of-pocket health expenditure, and recognition of the gaps in health financing and delivery of universal health coverage.

## The road to 2025: Fourth High-level Meeting of the UN General Assembly on the prevention and control of NCDs

Looking ahead to 2025, we also urge Member States to turn their attention to the Fourth UN High level Meeting on NCDs and engage with preparatory actions, with consideration of the following areas:

1. Ensure cancer and NCD prevention is a key pillar of the political declaration, with due focus on improving healthy diets, increasing physical activity and reducing alcohol consumption as modifiable risk factors. This is a key opportunity to prioritize cancer and NCD prevention on the global agenda, and to help enable successful achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.
2. Ensure all countries implement the commitments made at the 3 high-level meetings on NCDs in 2011, 2014 and 2018 – and all donors to scale up much-needed financial and technical contributions for the prevention and control of NCDs.
3. Include prevention as part of any NCD financing commitments, especially as part of efforts to achieve UHC by 2030.
4. Increase efforts in achieving health equity, including adequate financing allocations for UHC, engaging with WHO's recommendations for the social determinants of health, and addressing the impacts of commercial determinants on health.
5. Ensure global and national policy making processes are protected from undue influence from unhealthy commodity industries.
6. Ensure meaningful engagement with civil society actors such as World Cancer Research Fund International in preparation for the UN High level Meeting to support action on cancer and NCD prevention at global and country level.

### About us

World Cancer Research Fund International is a leading authority on the links between diet, nutrition, physical activity and cancer, and we work collaboratively with organisations around the world to encourage governments to implement policies to prevent cancer and other non-communicable diseases. World Cancer Research Fund International has been in official relations with the WHO since 2016.

### For more information on policy recommendations:

- Check out our **NOURISHING** and **MOVING** databases: a repository of global data on nutrition and physical activity policy actions, available here.
- Resources for policymakers on key issues related to cancer prevention are available here.
- All of our policy statements, including those delivered at previous WHO meetings, are available here.

### Acknowledgements

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### References:

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## Preventing cancer. Saving lives

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