

Statement at the UN High-Level Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases and the Promotion of Mental Health

25 September 2025

World Cancer Research Fund International welcomes the Political Declaration's recognition of cancer as a global priority and addressing its global burden, as well as the emphasis on the value of high-quality research and evidence to inform effective and innovative prevention and treatment of NCDs.

These are important gains. But prevention — the most effective and equitable path to reducing cancer and NCD burden — remains severely under-addressed in this final version. Without urgent action and international cooperation, we will not achieve SDG 3.4.

One in seven deaths worldwide is from cancer. Yet 40% of cancers are preventable if we address the major risk factors: unhealthy diets, alcohol, tobacco, obesity, and air pollution. The Declaration acknowledges these risks, but stronger commitments are needed to fully realise the potential of prevention.

The evidence is clear — health taxes are proven best buys, delivering health gains and strong economic returns. Moving forward, fiscal measures across alcohol, tobacco and sugar sweetened beverages must be at the heart of every national strategy for addressing NCDs as a minimum.

Prevention demands leadership, political courage and multi-sectoral collaboration. Finance ministries must act on implementing health taxes. Agriculture and trade must align to improve food environments. Education systems must embed health literacy from an early age. These are not add-ons to health—they are structural reforms essential to economic resilience, equity, and sustainable development.

Equally critical is addressing conflicts of interest. Industries whose products drive NCD risk and ill health must not shape or weaken health policy. Strong safeguards must be institutionalized to protect policy-making and ensure decisions advance public health and equity, not commercial profit.

Civil society, including people living with NCDs and mental health conditions, must also be central to governance. While the Declaration acknowledges their role, it represents a weakening compared to previous commitments. To drive real progress, participation must be meaningful, resourced, and embedded in national coordination mechanisms.

The Declaration must be a floor, not a ceiling. World Cancer Research Fund International stands ready to work with UN agencies and Member States to turn these commitments and more into action. We also stand by NCD Alliance's call to lead and committing to and taking action on NCDs. Together, we can strengthen global efforts on cancer prevention, reduce avoidable suffering, and advance health equity worldwide.