One Year After the United Nations Summit on Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs): New Opportunities and Challenges in the Fight Against NCDs

In September of this year, the global health community proudly celebrated the one-year anniversary of the United Nations (UN) Summit on Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs), held 19-20 September 2011, and the adoption of the UN Political Declaration on NCDs. For the first time in history, NCDs were formally recognised as a global health and development imperative that requires a multisectoral response involving all of government, as well as civil society, academia and parts of the private sector.

This past year has seen tremendous progress on NCDs at the global level, most notably with the adoption of a global target to reduce premature deaths from NCDs including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular and respiratory disease by 25% by 2025. The World Health Organization (WHO) is also leading a series of consultations that are vitally important to global action on NCDs. These consultations will result in: 1) A Global Monitoring Framework, with indicators, and a set of voluntary global targets for the prevention and control of NCDs; 2) A Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013–2020; 3) Options for strengthening and facilitating multisectoral action for the prevention and control of NCDs through partnerships.

Measuring Progress in the Fight Against NCDs

Of the 57 million global deaths in 2008, 36 million, or 63%, were due to NCDs, mainly cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, and chronic respiratory diseases. This proportion is projected to rise by 15% globally between 2010 and 2020, with low- and middle-income countries set to suffer a disproportionate burden.

In 2011, addressing health ministers from around the world, Dr Margaret Chan, Director General of the WHO, famously stated, “what gets measured gets done”, reminding the international community of the critical need to develop a solid monitoring framework for NCDs against which countries could measure and report progress on efforts to reduce the growing epidemic of NCDs.

On 7th November 2012, following a year-long consultation process led by the WHO, UN member states agreed the first ever comprehensive Global Monitoring Framework for the Prevention and Control of NCDs, including a set of voluntary global targets and indicators. The approved set of nine global targets and 25 indicators is a milestone achievement and sends the strong message that all countries are committed to achieving their ambition to reduce premature deaths from NCDs by 25% by 2025.

Assuring Balance for NCDs

The Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) and its partners in the NCD Alliance have been pushing for a comprehensive approach to the Global Monitoring Framework since discussions began immediately after the UN Summit on NCDs in September 2011. In recent months civil society groups scaled up their advocacy efforts and kept pressure on the WHO and governments to ensure a comprehensive set of targets were agreed that balanced prevention, treatment and care and matched the scale and complexity of the global epidemic.

As part of this advocacy push, UICC organised a roundtable discussion in Geneva, Switzerland, co-hosted by the United States and Panama Missions to the United Nations. This was a uniquely global and multisectoral event with representatives from over 20 UN Missions, as well as representatives from the WHO, other UN agencies, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector. During this 90-minute discussion, participants had the opportunity to share views on the emerging Global Monitoring Framework. There was strong consensus around the table that the Global Monitoring Framework should embrace NCD targets and indicators beyond prevention, and recognise that we have a responsibility to the millions of individuals worldwide already living with NCDs.

The Global Monitoring Framework for NCDs: Advocacy “Wins” and Shortcomings

The global targets adopted cover prevention (tobacco, physical inactivity, alcohol, salt, raised blood pressure, and diabetes/obesity) and the health system response (improving the availability of essential medicines and technologies, and counselling and drug therapy for the prevention of heart attack and stroke).

Mr Cary Adams, Chair of the NCD Alliance and CEO of UICC said, “We are proud to witness the first set of global targets and indicators that
signal a new era of accountability for the millions of people with NCDs worldwide. We commend WHO and Member States for agreeing a comprehensive set of targets that balance both prevention and treatment."

In addition to the targets addressing risk factors for NCDs, UICC welcomes the adoption of indicators on availability of services important to cancer control, such as cervical cancer screening and the indicator on morphine consumption as a measure of availability of palliative care. UICC was particularly pleased to see that member states recognised the importance of cancer-related infections by including targets for hepatitis B (HBV) and human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines. There was some concern among member states about the current cost of the HPV vaccine which led to agreement of an indicator at policy level, but as many member states from the African region said, what is important at this stage is that it is being monitored. Julie Torode, Deputy CEO and Director of Advocacy and Programmes at UICC said, "The price of the HPV vaccine has come down tremendously in the few years it has been available. The GAVI announcement to include the HPV vaccine in its portfolio of vaccines allows access to those countries with the highest burden to really address this issue. We do believe that this will bring the price of this vaccine down even further in the coming years, making it a cost effective solution for other countries wishing to save women from cervical cancer."

One disappointment was that there was no breast cancer screening indicator signed off by member states, despite passionate support from some regions. However, we are pleased that this has led to a commitment to address breast cancer screening in the Global Action Plan on NCDs. Over the coming months, UICC and NCD Alliance partners will continue advocacy efforts to ensure that key issues like this, which are not addressed in the Global Monitoring Framework, will be not be lost, but rather integrated into the Global Action Plan for NCDs 2013-2020.

From Consultations, Declarations and Resolutions... To Action
With these targets and indicators finalised, the focus will now turn to the 2013-2020 Global Action Plan on NCDs and its implementation, which is currently being drafted by the WHO and member states.

The NCD Alliance has urged member states to view the three aforementioned WHO consultation processes as complementary components of a comprehensive Global NCD Framework. By explicitly integrating one to the other, the international community can end the piecemeal approach to NCDs. The components fit together neatly: the Global NCD Plan will define the priorities over the next seven years and recommend clear actions for all sectors; the Global Monitoring Framework with targets will be fully integrated into the Global Plan to monitor progress towards these priorities; and a Global Coordinating Mechanism (or partnership) will mobilise multisectoral action and resources to see the Plan fully implemented.

UICC and its NCD partners have expressed support of their expertise and their knowledge in taking the Global Monitoring Framework forward into an equally bold and comprehensive Global Action Plan for NCDs for 2013-2020.
sector, with appropriate safeguards to manage potential conflicts of interest, is more critical than ever.

There is a clear willingness in the private sector to engage at this level; according to a recent survey conducted by BSR, 40% of companies expect to increase their commitment to Global Health Partnerships focused on NCDs in the next five years. Global Health Partnerships could play an important role in improving primary healthcare systems that are the front lines – particularly in low- and middle-income countries – for engaging communities with prevention, diagnosis and treatment across a range of diseases including cancer. UICC and NCD Alliance partners will continue to closely follow discussions surrounding the development of options for multisectoral NCD partnerships, which are tabled for discussion at the UN General Assembly on 28 November 2012.

Looking Ahead: Priorities for 2013

The adoption of the UN Political Declaration on NCDs in September 2011 and the three aforementioned consultation processes have started and will continue to carve out a new global advocacy space for the cancer and broader NCD community, and an opportunity to ensure that NCDs including cancer continue to occupy a place on the global health and development agenda.

Ensuring that NCDs are part of the 2013 Millennium Development Goal review and emerging debate on universal health coverage, the sustainable development goals and other development issues will also be vital to ensuring that cancer remains central to future thinking. As cancer advocates, we face both new opportunities and challenges as ‘late-comers’ to the development discourse. Now more than ever, innovative partnerships that go beyond traditional health groups, and embrace partners in the development sphere including reproductive, maternal and child health organisations, as well as the AIDS community, are critical if we are to succeed in reducing the cancer burden for future generations.

NCD Alliance

The NCD Alliance was founded by the International Diabetes Federation, the Union for International Cancer Control, the World Heart Federation and the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union). The NCD Alliance is a network of more than 2000 organisations leading the global civil society movement against premature death and preventable illness and disability from non-communicable diseases (NCDs), including cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory disease, and diabetes.

References

3. WHO (2012) Report of the Formal Meeting of Member States to conclude the work on the comprehensive global monitoring framework, including indicators and a set of voluntary global targets for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases (A/ NCD(2) Available at: http://apps.who.int/gb/ncds/pdf/A_NCD_2-en.pdf