



WHO Global Conference on Noncommunicable Diseases

The WHO Global Conference on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs), which will be held in Montevideo from October 18-20, 2017, will be hosted by the president of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez.

The purpose of the event is to enhance policy coherence among the various spheres of policymaking that impact the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 3.4 on NCDs, which is to reduce premature mortality from NCDs by one third by 2030 through prevention and treatment.

Objectives

- To provide guidance to Member States on how to meet SDG target 3.4 by 2030 by influencing public policies in various sectors (health, trade, and education, among others).
- To launch a set of new global initiatives which will help countries accelerate their progress to date in reducing premature mortality from NCDs.
- To exchange national experiences in enhancing policy coherence to meet the nine voluntary global NCD targets by 2025.

Announcement

The event is an undertaking by the president of Uruguay, Tabaré Vázquez, who spoke before the United Nations in September 2016 on the need to gather the countries' highest-level decision makers to work on how to enhance coherence in terms of public policies. The conference is being organized jointly by the WHO and the Uruguayan government.

On May 25th of this year, during an event held concurrently with the 70th World Health Assembly in Geneva, WHO officials, together with the Minister of Public Health of Uruguay, Jorge Basso, formally announced the event and invited representatives from around the world to participate in the conference.

The undertaking is also part of the preparation process for the third High-Level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on NCDs, scheduled to take place in the United States in 2018.

Health: One of the linchpins of President Vázquez's agenda

Health is a priority to the leader, who studied medicine at the University of the Republic of Uruguay, from where he graduated in 1969 as a general practitioner and in August 1972 as a specialist in Oncology and Radiation Therapy. Tabaré was an adjunct professor of Oncology at the Medical School of the University of the Republic. In 1985, he was appointed head of the Radiation Therapy Section of the school's Department of Oncology.

In mid 1986, in partnership with two other colleagues, he purchased 75% of the shares of Clínica Barcia, which was then named Centro de Oncología y Radioterapia, better known as Clínica COR, one of the most renowned oncology clinics in Uruguay. During his presidency, Vázquez worked at that clinic with a reduced number of patients.

During his first presidential term, he spearheaded a series of extremely strict policies against the country's tobacco companies, which earned him the recognition of the international community and health care organizations. In 2006, tobacco company Philip Morris sued Uruguay in the amount of 25 million dollars, alleging a violation of the bilateral investment agreement between Switzerland and Uruguay. On July 8, 2016, the CIADI decided in favor of Uruguay, obligating the complainants to pay the defendants' fees and court costs.



In May 2015, during a meeting with the General Secretary of UNASUR, Ernesto Samper, President Vázquez expressed his concern and the need to work on the prevention of NCDs in the region. Both agreed on the use of a holistic perspective to address the subject of health in the region, focusing in particular on investments in prevention and diagnosis campaigns.

In September 2016, in his message to the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly, Tabaré Vázquez called for the creation of a vast global alliance for health and life. “From this platform we invite countries, governments, citizens, non-governmental organizations, and scientific and medical associations to create a forum, a vast global alliance, to fight the epidemic of noncommunicable diseases,” he said. The speech bore some similarity to his address to this same body the year before, when he also made reference to chronic diseases.

Background

Oleg Chesnov, the Assistant Director General for Noncommunicable Diseases at the WHO, emphasized that it will be “an unprecedented event” in response to these diseases given that it will involve the presidential level in order to achieve the highest level commitment to craft the policies needed to decrease the burden of NCDs.

While this is the first time this conference is being held, there is a precedent involving conferences focused on NCDs, including:

- First world conference on healthy lifestyles and the fight against noncommunicable diseases, which took place in Moscow (Russian Federation) on April 28-29, 2011.
- United Nations High-Level Meeting on noncommunicable diseases, which was held in New York on September 19-20, 2011.
- The 64th Session of the Regional Committee within the framework of the 28th Pan American Sanitary Conference, which took place in the United States on September 17-21, 2012. At that time, the “[Strategy for the prevention and control of NCDs](#)” was adopted.
- The 66th Session of the UN General Assembly, which adopted the [Policy Statement by the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases](#). This statement sparked the creation of the “[Draft of a global action plan for the prevention and control of NCDs](#).”

Participation

The invitation is intended for:

- Heads of State and Government
- Ministers of Health, Agriculture, Cooperation & Development, Finance, Foreign Affairs, Planning, and Trade
- Public policy decision makers
- United Nations organizations
- Non-State actors
- Members of the United Nations Inter-Institutional Task Force on the Prevention and Control of NCDs
- Participants in the WHO global coordination mechanism on the prevention and control of NCDs
- Philanthropic foundations
- Academic institutions

The WHO has asked Member States to designate a maximum of two representatives, recommending that one of the designated individuals be from the health sector and the other from a sector other than health but which impacts NCDs.



Anyone who wishes to participate in the event should email their expression of interest to policycoherence2017@who.int no later than September 8, 2017. The WHO will send a personalized invitation letter. Participation by UN organizations and non-state actors is by invitation.

Representatives from the media who are interested in covering the Conference must request credentials by contacting lrecalde@presidencia.gub.uy and garwoodp@who.int. More information for participants can be found by clicking on this [link](#).

The conferences will be divided into three segments:

- Dialogue of Member States, United Nations organizations, and non-State actors
- Ministerial Segment for Member States and United Nations organizations at the level of Ministers and National Directors on NCDs
- High-Level Segment for Member States and United Nations Organizations at the level of Heads of State and Government and Heads of UN organizations

You can download a preliminary conference program by clicking on this [link](#).

The topics to be addressed include:

- Preventive measures to fight against NCDs.
- Implementation of policies to increase countries' involvement and accountability in terms of results.
- Promotion of universal health coverage.
- Regulatory frameworks for investment in preventing and controlling NCDs.
- Business policies with regard to public health.
- Equitable access to medications and essential technologies.

The organizing committee will announce the list of speakers for the conference in September.

Why is this conference important?

World leaders agree that the global burden and threat of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) – mainly cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases – represent one of the major health challenges of our times.

In 2015, NCDs were responsible for 40 million deaths, representing 70% of all deaths worldwide. A large proportion of deaths were premature: over 15 million people (38% of NCD deaths and 27% of all global deaths) died between the ages of 30 and 70.

85% of premature deaths from NCDs occurred in developing countries, including 41% in lower- and middle-income countries where the probability of dying from an NCD between the ages of 30 and 70 is up to four times higher than in developed countries. Most of these 15 million premature deaths from NCDs could have been prevented or delayed.

That said, based on the current rate of decline in premature mortality from the four main NCDs, the world will not be able to meet Sustainable Development Goal target 3.4 to reduce premature mortality from NCDs by one third by 2030 through prevention and treatment.

National policies in sectors other than health greatly impact premature mortality from NCDs. Health gains can be achieved much more readily by influencing public policies in sectors such as agriculture, food production,



pharmaceutical production, taxation, trade, and urban development than by making changes in health policy alone. One of the main obstacles at the country level, however, is a lack of capacity to achieve policy coherence – across all sectors, at all levels, and by all actors – for reducing premature deaths from NCDs.

Expected results

The Conference is expected to result in a concise outcome document that will be endorsed and signed by the participants. The outcome document may also serve as a contribution to the discussions at the 71st World Health Assembly, to be held in Geneva in May 2018.

The contributions to the Conference to be held in Montevideo will also be extremely relevant to the intergovernmental process on the outcome document for the third High-Level Meeting on NCDs in 2018, which will take place under the auspices of the President of the UN General Assembly.

Live broadcast

All plenary sessions will be broadcast live at www.who.int/montevideo2017, with audio in English and Spanish.